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Customer Perspectives on Sales Strategies: A Relational Approach

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CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVES ON SALES STRATEGIES: A RELATIONAL APPROACH

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Marketing

by

Juliana Catherine White
B.S., Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, 2012
M.S., University of South Florida, 2014
December 2018

*To my family for inspiring me, my cohort for supporting me, and my advisors for guiding me—
this dissertation is dedicated to you.*

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ABSTRACT

Relationship marketing strategies have long been known to affect salespeople and the customers they serve. However, there is still much to learn about the mechanisms that drive such buyer-seller relationships. This research examines how a salesperson's behavior, relational orientation, and individual disposition dynamically interact to influence customers in the business to business marketing environment. Data collected from the customers' point of view reveal several unique salesperson competencies and strategies that affect the buyer-seller relationship. The final dataset ($n = 206$) included customers' observations about their salesperson and perceptions of relationship quality. The key findings suggest that the perceived quality of buyer and seller relationships is highly dependent on selling strategies, behaviors, and relational factors enacted by salespeople. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling was used to uncover correlations between selling strategies and critical dimensions of the customer-seller relationship. Final results indicate that selling strategies enacted by salespeople affect critical dimensions of the buyer-seller relationship. Furthermore, the effects of customers' perceptions of relationship quality were found to correlate strongly with salesperson performance outcomes. Managerial implications of this research are far-reaching as the results provide direction for sales organizations in the way of both training and management. The impact on overall selling performance is discussed and future research directions are examined.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This dissertation presents a new model of salesperson strategy as it relates to the buyer-seller relationship. In the pages following the motivations for the current study will be outlined, a literature review of all key variables will be provided, relevant theory will be examined, the conceptual model and hypotheses for the research will be presented, and the research plan will be discussed. Once the framework of the research is introduced, this dissertation will move to introduce the method, outline sample and data collection procedures, analyses, results, managerial implications, and will then offer future research directions.

This research represents a joining of two distinct streams of literature: sales strategy and relationship marketing. The literature reviews which follow will outline past work in sales strategy literature and examine extant research in customer relationship management. This dissertation will offer clarification on how these two domains of research intersect to inform the conceptual model.

The domain of sales literature has brought forth several key strategies and behaviors critical to the success of the salesperson. Adaptive selling behavior, customer oriented selling behavior, and customer extra role behavior comprise the three independent domains of study. These strategies/behaviors have emerged as key indicators of a salesperson's ability to perform the functions of their job in a way that satisfies firm goals and objectives. A literature review of past findings pertaining to these strategies will be offered along with rationalization for their inclusion in the conceptual model.

While past work in the sales domain typically only tied these distinct selling strategies/behaviors to objective sales performance data, this study will utilize these strategies/behaviors in a way which tests their impact on the customer relationship as well as the

resulting sales performance. This is a unique contribution of the model as the sales literature largely favors financial performance indicators as dependent variables rather than measures of relationship quality. The conceptual model therefore provides an important link between relationship-based outcomes and objective sales outcomes.

The importance of examining relationship outcomes is elucidated in the meta-analysis of sales literatures presented by Schrock et al. (2016). In this study, bibliometric analysis is used to uncover underlying themes in *The Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*—the paramount outlet for sales strategy research. Schrock et al. (2016) point to thematic developments in sales literature and indicate that relationship marketing in the context of sales is a fruitful future direction for sales researchers to undertake. This study attempts to fulfill the need for sales researchers to more closely examine the effects of relationship factors on the salesperson-customer interaction and the ultimate financial outcome performance.

After review of the three key selling strategies and behaviors, this dissertation will review literature in the domain of relationship marketing and customer relationship management to uncover the key variables that define the buyer-seller relationship. In this way, the conceptual model represents a merging of two literature domains—sales strategy and relationship marketing. In determining the quality of a relationship and what specific factors influence customer perceptions of a buyer-seller relationship, several unique variables emerge. Salesperson empathy, salesperson reliability, value co-creation, and communications are all proposed as fundamental variables which characterize the buyer-seller relationship, and which strongly influence the quality of that relationship.

As the notions of sales and service continue to merge in the organizational climate (Vargo and Lusch 2004; Moncrief and Marshall 2005), salespeople are increasingly being

required to initiate, build, and maintain customer relationships long after the initial point of sale. This study offers an important contribution to this area of research as it illuminates the effects of specific sales strategies on buyer-seller relationship quality.

The conceptual model proposed will offer an outline of the impacts of sales strategy on a mediating mechanism of relationship factors as they relate to relationship quality and objective sales performance. Data collected from customers (n=206) at a sales organization which has a culture of emphasizing customer engagement and building customer relationships provides a means of testing the conceptual model herein. This business firm is typical of many sales organizations in that salespeople are encouraged to foster meaningful relationships with their buyers. The inherent structure of the sales organization additionally offers generalizability to the results, allowing for the extension of the findings beyond the primary firm of study.

One differentiating factor of the data used to test the conceptual model is the customers' perspective. While much sales research offers only the salesperson's or sales organization's perspective (Johnson et al. 2014), this research examines sales strategies and relationship factors from the customers' perspectives. Tuli, Kohli, and Bharadwaj (2007) found statistically significant differences between customer and salesperson perspectives on customer solutions, customer services, and customer relationship maintenance. This finding offers further credence to the study at hand as the dataset is measured from the customers' perspectives and provides valuable insight into buyers' thought processes and perceptions. Johnson et al. (2014) also call for the use of customers' perspectives as they cite that much of sales research neglects to capture this buyer perspective. Much sales research tends to be conducted from the vantage point of the firm—data is typically gathered either from managers, salespeople, or employees of the business units in question (Johnson et al. 2014). The use of the customers' perspectives allows this

dissertation to make a strong contribution to sales research and to the broader business discipline. Measuring relational approaches solely from the salesperson's or sales organization's perspective is a limitation of much research in the sales domain. The proposed model will circumvent this limitation by testing relational variables with the customers' outlook.

This study will provide an enriched perspective on the buyer-seller relationship by joining two distinct literature streams together and filling existing gaps and limitations in the domain of sales strategy.

1.1. Motivation

Relationship marketing strategies have long been known to impact service employees and the customers they serve (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Netemeyer et al. 2005). However, there is still much to learn about the mechanisms that drive such relationships in the domain of buyer-seller interactions. This research seeks to understand how a salesperson's behavior, selling strategy, relational orientation, and individual disposition dynamically interact to influence customer perceptions.

Data collected from the buyer's perspective are believed to demonstrate the unique ways in which customers are influenced by sales strategies, behaviors, and tactics. The results of this study seek to confirm that customers' perceptions of relationship quality are impacted by their salesperson's proactive selling strategies and mediated by specific relationship dimensions. Further, these effects may be moderated by situational relationship dimensions such as the level of conflict embedded within the buyer-seller interaction as well as the degree of demandingness exhibited by the customer.

Investigating the unique competencies of salespeople and their overarching effects as viewed through the eyes of their customers is the primary motivation of this study. Because data

were collected from customers' perspectives, important outcomes which influence relationship quality, customer loyalty, and overall selling performance may be uncovered.

Recent work in sales literature calls for an increase in customer-based and dyadic salesperson-customer samples as much of sales research utilizes only the salesperson's, sales manager's, or sales organization's perspective (Johnson, Friend, & Malshe 2016; Johnson, Friend, & Horn 2014). Specifically, Johnson et al. (2014) make a strong call to action for sales researchers to incorporate more customer samples into their research and cite the enriched perspective as critical for deriving accurate managerial insights. This provides compelling motivation for the domain of study and the specific context of the data.

The customer point of view is highly valuable because it illuminates important insights about the buyer's mindset and holds important managerial implications for firms. Tuli, Kohli, and Bharadwaj (2007) further motivate this topic of study as their work revealed statistically significant differences between salesperson perspectives and customer perspectives. This lends credence to this research and provides academic importance to the use of customer perspectives in the exploration of salesperson strategies and behaviors.

A second driving factor for this study is elucidated by Schrock, Zhao, Hughes, and Richards (2016) in their meta-analysis of the *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management (JPSSM)*. In this meta-analysis, Schrock et al. (2016) use bibliometric techniques to uncover the importance of relationship marketing as critical future direction for sales researchers. The trend seen across sales literature reflects a renewed emphasis on customer relationship maintenance (Moncrief and Marshall 2005), relationship marketing (Palmatier et al. 2006), and the viewpoint that salespeople are not simply sellers but are also customer influencers, relationship builders, and relationship maintainers (Schrock et al. 2016). The evolution of the sales literature toward a

relationship-based paradigm therefore provides another strong reason for this specific research topic and context.

Additional motivation for this study is in the proposed process model which tests three unique selling strategies and behaviors collectively against one another. While sales researchers have individually explored adaptive selling strategy, customer-oriented selling strategy, and customer extra role behavior, review of the literature will reveal that these three strategies have not been tested simultaneously together to examine their effects relative to each other. This research may therefore fulfill a gap in extant sales literature. The key findings of this study seek to provide important insight into which strategies are most effective in the customer's mind and which strategies are most impactful on the customer relationship. The implications of these findings are far-reaching for sales managers and sales practitioners as understanding which strategies to train new salespeople on could be a strong determinant of overall success.

Further motivation for this study is seen in the proposed mediating mechanism of relationship factors. By pulling from both the relationship marketing and customer relationship management literature, four factors which define the quality of a buyer-seller relationship are uncovered: salesperson empathy, salesperson reliability, value co-creation, and communications. It is believed that testing these relationship factors will reveal the process by which customers make value judgements about sales strategies and how these strategies relate to the buyer-seller relationship and overall relationship quality. While previous literature in sales has examined these variables individually or in tandem, this study is the first to the author's knowledge which examines all four relationship factors concurrently. This fills an existing gap in sales literature which calls for further study of relationship marketing factors in a sales-specific context (Shrock et al. 2016). Additionally, because these process variables are tested from the customer's

perspective, this research can draw a clear picture of the buyer's mindset which is a valuable avenue for sales researchers to traverse (Johnson et al. 2014).

The unique contribution of this model is that never have these three strategies/behaviors been tested all together to examine their impact relative to one another. Testing the three selling strategies together offers valuable insight into which strategies may be most influential to overall relationship quality and sales success. Findings which emerge may allow for managerially relevant insight into which strategies are most important to the customer relationship and in turn, which strategies firms should train their salespeople on.

Additionally, it is quite rare that selling strategies are measured from the customers' perspective and even more rare that the selling strategies are tied to an outcome variable which is not based solely on objective measures of financial sales performance (net revenues, percent to quota, goal achievement, etc.). The use of a relationship outcome variable (perceived quality of interactions) gives a novel perspective for the study of these three selling strategies.

This dissertation provides a joining of three distinct literature streams and the conceptual model is compelled by all three of the following domains: sales strategy, relationship marketing, and service quality. Utilizing three different streams of academic literature to conceptualize the model allows for a richer understanding of the relationships at play. The three distinct streams of literature and their overarching impacts on the study at hand is illustrated in Figure 1.1 below.

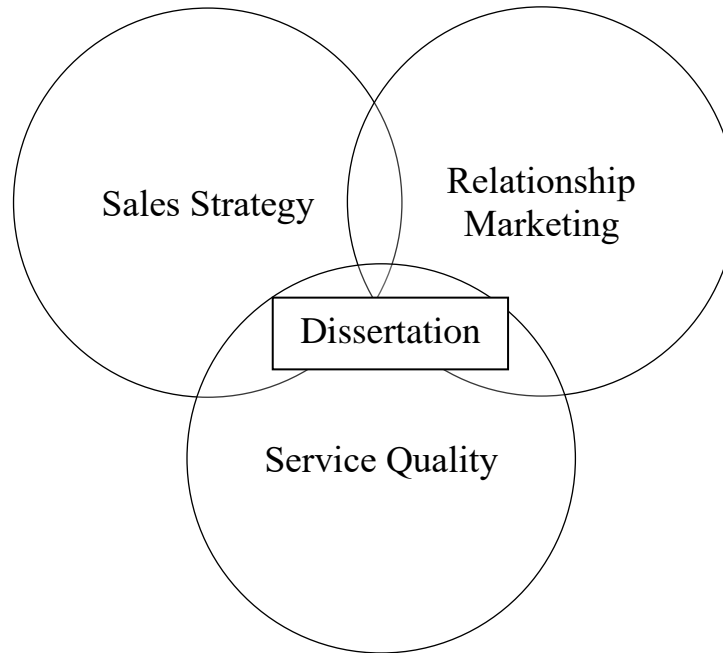


Figure 1.1. Literature Streams Venn Diagram

1.2. Key Research Questions

The modern sales organization must compete in ever-changing and increasingly competitive markets (Bolander et al. 2015). Understanding how firms can effectively utilize their salespeople to deliver the highest quality customer relationships is of great import to the future of the sales domain (Schrock et al. 2016). This knowledge leads to the formulation of key research questions for the dissertation:

- How can salespeople best strategize during customer engagement to maximize long-term customer relationships?
- What individual strategies enacted by salespeople are most likely to drive relationship quality as assessed by the customer?
- What impact does relationship quality have on overall sales performance?

Together, the testing of sales strategies and behaviors with a mediating process mechanism of customer relationship dimensions and two distinct outcome variables comprise the

proposed model. Antecedent variables in the model include sales strategies and behaviors as perceived by customers. Mediating variables in the model include buyer-seller relationship factors as perceived by customers. Outcome variables in the model include both a scale measure of relationship quality as perceived by customers and an objective sales performance measure. The use of objective financial sales performance measures is typical of much sales research (Schrock et al. 2016). Assessing the relative impacts of this selling-strategy/behavior and relationship process model on both a relational outcome and a sales performance outcome provides compelling motivation for the study at hand. An outline of this broad conceptual model is presented in Figure 1.2 below.

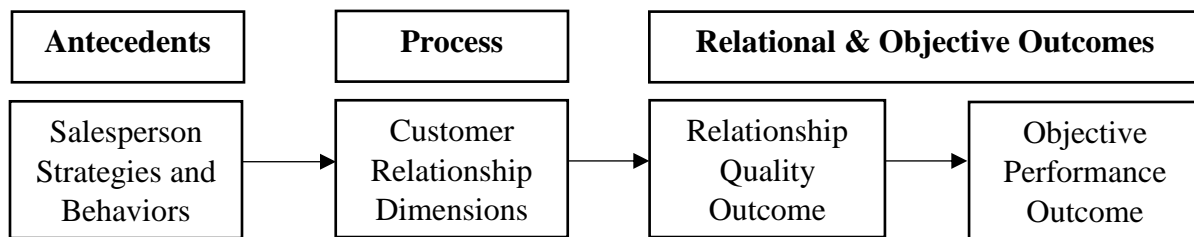


Figure 1.2. Broad Conceptual Model

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Sales Strategy Literature

The exploration of past studies, findings, and research settings in extant literature is critical to the development of this dissertation and the construction of the conceptual model. To ground this study of specific sales strategies and behaviors as independent variables in the model, it is prudent to first examine the evolution of sales literature over time. As will become clear in the specific literature reviews of each variable, these strategies/behaviors are the most widely seen in sales literature and encompass many years of past study.

Sales research has vested much study into the specific strategies and behaviors enacted by salespeople which lead to positive financial outcomes for firms. Identifying critical strategies which lead to selling success has been the focus of much study in the domain of sales (Schrock et al. 2016). This dissertation tests three of these strategies/behaviors and their history and use in sales literature will be outlined in the pages that follow.

2.2. Adaptive Selling Behavior

Adaptive selling behavior is defined as “the altering of sales behaviors during the customer interaction or across customer interactions based on perceived information about the nature of the selling situation” (Weitz, Suja, and Suja 1986). Extant literature demonstrates that adaptive selling can improve salesperson effectiveness (Weitz 1981) as it allows salespeople to customize and reformat their messages in accordance with the individual customer (Franke and Park 2006). Adaptive selling requires that salespeople build and leverage strong knowledge bases to meet customer needs (Morgan and Stoltman 1990; Chonko and Jones 2005).

The notion of salespeople adapting to their individual customers is indicative of greater selling success, and this outcome is seen across a variety of dependent variables such as customer loyalty, intent to repurchase, and satisfaction with the firm (Wang, Wang, and Hou 2016). Adaptive selling has received ample study by sales researchers over the years. An aggregation of past research findings pertaining to this variable is included in Table 2.1 below.

This table and the tables that follow represent the culmination of extensive searches through academic sales and business journals. In order to ensure that these literature searches were exhaustive and complete for each variable under study, detailed reviews of empirical work were utilized and journal libraries were combed for updates. The tables are organized chronologically with the earliest known use of the variables listed first. Tables include author and journal information, sample and data source, the key variables used for the study, and finally the important findings yielded from the research. It is essential to note that the key findings listed are those deemed to be most crucial to this dissertation and the study at hand. As such, the key findings are framed with respect to the present research within the dissertation. A summary of key takeaways from Table 2.1 is available in the appendix.

Table 2.1. Literature Review of Adaptive Selling

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan, 1986 (JM)	Conceptual	Adaptive Selling	Provides a theoretical framework for understanding the ability component of job performance. This framework defines adaptive selling as a <i>behavior</i> . Offers several testable propositions for future research.

(Table cont'd)

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
Spiro & Weitz, 1990 (JMR)	268 Salespeople	IV's: Adaptive Selling, Performance, Self-Monitoring, Androgyny, Empathy, Openers, Intrinsic Motivation, Locus of Control, Experience, Management Style	Scale development piece for the Adaptive Selling construct (ADAPTS scale). Psychometric properties of the scale indicate it is appropriate for academic research and managerial practice.
Spiro & Weitz, 1990 (JMR)	268 Salespeople	IV's: Adaptive Selling, Performance, Self-Monitoring, Androgyny, Empathy, Openers, Intrinsic Motivation, Locus of Control, Experience, Management Style	Scale development piece for the Adaptive Selling construct (ADAPTS scale). Psychometric properties of the scale indicate it is appropriate for academic research and managerial practice.
Morgan and Stoltman (1990) JPSSM	Conceptual	Adaptive Selling	Calls for researchers to develop a better understanding of the skills and abilities underlying adaptive selling. Cites some problems with applying flawed theories to salesperson behavior. Provides a good overview of adaptive selling principles and emphasizes how adaptability behavior stems from internal knowledge structures.
Anglin, Stoltman, and Gentry (1990) JPSSM	26 sales managers, 102 salespeople	IV: Adaptive Selling DV: Sales performance	Found tentative support for the proposition that high performers engage in adaptive selling behavior. Higher performing salespeople tended to react to the presented selling situation more appropriately.
Weilbaker (1990), JPSSM	69 salespeople, sales managers, and customers	IV: Adaptive Selling (Qualitative study—rank order of importance)	Makes conceptual case for studying selling abilities. All three stakeholder groups perceived adaptive selling behavior as very important for selling success.
Goolsby, Lagace, and Boorum (1992), JPSSM	106 female salespeople, 71 male salespeople	IV's: Adaptive selling, self-monitoring, psychological androgyny, intrinsic reward orientation DV: sales performance	There were significant gender differences relating to 3 of the 5 dimensions of sales performance (specifically in terms of adaptive selling).

(Table cont'd)

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
Vink and Verbeke (1993), JPSSM	201 sales employees	IV's: Adaptive selling, motivation to work, attributions for failures, reward orientation, organizational characteristics	Tested robustness of original adaptive selling conceptual framework proposed by Sujan and Weitz (1985; 1986. Determined it is a more complex construct than simply "working smarter".
Bodkin and Stevenson (1993), Journal of Marketing Management	101 distributors	IV's: Three dimensions of Adaptive Selling Behavior (sales call planning, customer information gathering, competitor information gathering) as well as Intention to Adapt (Factor Analysis)	Adapters showed the greatest differences from non-adapters in the dimension of sales call planning. There were mixed findings regarding sales experience. Sales position characteristics distinguished two types of sellers across adaptive selling behavior measures.
Sujan, Weitz, and Kumar (1994), JM	190 salespeople	IV: Adaptive Selling, working smart, learning orientation, working hard, performance orientation DV: Sales performance	Included ASB as a subcomponent of the "working smart" construct. Learning orientation was positively related.
Tanner (1994), JPSSM	58 booth attendants (i.e. trade show sellers)	IV: Adaptive Selling Controls: Training level, booth experience, sales experience	Booth attendants adapted to the type of customer they were serving. Experience was not related to ASB. Training did not seem to affect ASB.
Predmore and Bonnice (1994), JPSSM	50 salespeople and 10 taped sales calls	IV: Adaptive selling DV: Two different measures of sales performance	Found that observed ASB could predict sales performance—telemarketers who adjusted their communication style during the sales exchange demonstrated higher sales performance.
Blackshear and Plank (1994), JMTP	118 salespeople and concurrent managerial assessments	IV: Adaptive Selling, Task-Specific Behaviors DV: Sales performance	Sellers' behaviors were found to have a positive impact on sales performance. Adaptive selling was found to be positively related to sales performance.
Siguaw and Honeycutt (1995), IMM	268 salespeople	IV: Adaptive selling, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, role conflict/ambiguity, market orientation, customer orientation DV: Sales performance	Women reported lower levels of conflict/ambiguity and higher levels of customer-oriented selling.

(Table cont'd)

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
Marks, Vorhies, and Badovick (1996), JPSSM	179 salespeople	IV: Adaptive Selling (two dimensions – AS Beliefs and AS behaviors) DV: Sales performance	Found that the ADAPTS scale has two dimensions (beliefs and behaviors). AS Beliefs were not found to influence sales performance directly while AS behaviors were positively related to sales performance.
Marks and Badovick (1997), <i>Developments in Marketing Science</i>	179 salespeople	IV: Adaptive selling, task-related sales behaviors, goal commitment DV: Sales performance	Adaptive selling and TRB were related to goal commitment. Authors found no support that goal commitment influences sales performance or that adaptive selling is related to TRSB
Dion, Easterling, and Javalgi (1997), IMM	124 salespeople	IV: Adaptive Selling	Industrial customers did not perceive any differences in adaptiveness between female salespeople and their male counterparts.
Boorum, Goolsby, and Ramsey (1998), JAMS	239 insurance salespeople	IV: Adaptive selling, communications apprehension, interaction involvement DV: Sales performance	Interaction involvement was found to be moderately associated with ASB and sales performance. Adaptive selling was found to be somewhat related to sales performance.
Eppler et al. (1998), <i>Journal of Business and Economic Studies</i>	329 salespeople in real estate industry	IV: Adaptive selling, self-monitoring DV: sales performance	Adaptive selling is positively related to the salesperson's self-monitoring trait and to their sales performance. Self-monitoring was not related to sales performance.
Keillor, Parker, and Pettijohn (2000), <i>Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing</i>	126 salespeople	IV: Adaptive Selling, selling orientation/customer orientation (SOCO), service orientation DV: sales performance (average annual sales in \$)	Found the adaptive selling is situation-specific. Did not find a significant correlation between adaptive selling on actual performance.
Pettijohn et al. (2000), <i>Journal of Applied Business Research</i>	62 salespeople	IV: Adaptive Selling DV: 3 different measures of sales performance	Higher ASB was associated with a higher closing ratio, but there was no support that higher ASB would provide higher sales volume. They found no clear relationship between ASB and sales performance.

(Table cont'd)

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
Porter and Inks (2000), JPSSM	161 salespeople	IV: Attributional complexity DV: Adaptive Selling	Salespeople with a high degree of attributional complexity will have a stronger predisposition to practice ASB.
Bush et al. (2001), JAMS	122 salespeople	IV: Adaptive selling, intercultural disposition DV: Perceived intercultural communication competence	Both intercultural disposition and ASB both affected the perceived intercultural communication competence of marketing executives. ASB was found to positively enhance a salesperson's ability to build relationships with customers and lead to improved performance.
Robinson et al. (2002), JPSSM	1042 salespeople (random sample)	IV: Adaptive selling DV: Sales performance, sales experience	Tested the psychometric properties of the ADAPTS scale (factor structure, dimensionality, reliability, and validity). The reevaluated, shortened version of the scale was significantly positively correlated with both sales experience and sales performance.
Park and Holloway (2003), JPSSM	199 salespeople from a Korean firm	IV: Adaptive selling, learning orientation DV: Objective sales performance measure, subjective sales performance measure, job satisfaction	Adaptive selling was found to significantly contribute to sales performance and job satisfaction. ASB also had a significant positive influence on all sales performance measures. Learning orientation was found to be related to the practice of adaptive selling behaviors.
Porter, Wiener, and Frankwick (2003), JPSSM	168 salespeople from 2 different companies	IV: Adaptive selling Mediators: Buying task/selling situation DV: Sales performance	The selling environment moderates the strength of the relationship between ASB and the selling effectiveness outcome variable (sales performance). This finding is important because it suggests that ASB is impactful across different selling environments.
Verbeke, Belschak, and Bagozzi (2004), JAMS	93 salespeople from insurance and financial products industries	IV: Pride, working hard, self-efficacy, helping, sportsmanship, civic virtue, and courtesy DV: Adaptive Selling	Pride was found to facilitate goal striving in salespeople and had adaptive consequences. Pride had the highest positive effect on ASB among all of the tested variables. (Note—this was a CFA)
Chakrabarty et al. (2004), JPSSM	241 salespeople across different industries	IV: Adaptive Selling (CFA)	Analyzed psychometric properties of the ADAPTS scale and found that it was as good a measure as the Marks, Vorhies, and Badovick (MVB) scale.

(Table cont'd)

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
Giacobbe, Jackson Jr., Crosby, and Bridges (2006) JPSSM	380 salespeople and 50 sales managers	IV: Empathetic ability, cue perception ability, and ability to modify Mediators: Intention to practice ASB, Adaptive Selling Moderators: Experience DV: Sales performance	Findings strongly indicate that ASB is positively associated with salesperson performance and that the sales situation moderates the strength of the relationship.
Kidwell, McFarland, and Avila (2007) JPSSM	135 matched salespeople and sales managers	IV: Adaptive selling, customer-oriented selling Moderator: Perceiving emotions ability DV: Sales performance (perceived performance and supervisor ratings of performance)	Findings indicated that salespeople who employ adaptive selling behavior are more successful at influencing their customers, but for sales managers there was no relationship between performance outcomes and adaptive selling/customer-oriented selling behaviors. Results supported a moderated influence of the salesperson's ability to perceive emotions of the adaptive selling/sales performance relationship.
Jaramillo et al. (2007) JPSSM	223 Ecuadorian salespeople and objective sales data	IV: Intrinsic motivation Mediator: Adaptive selling Moderator: Initiative DV: Objective job performance Control variables: Customer orientation, extrinsic motivation, experience	Salesperson initiative was found to strengthen the relationship between intrinsic motivation and adaptive selling. Results supported the notion that adaptive selling is a significant antecedent of objective salesperson performance.
Rapp et al. (2008) JPSSM	662 salespeople and 60 sales managers (average 11 sales reps per manager)	IVs: Use of sales force automation (SFA), Use of CRM Mediators: Adaptive selling, effort Moderator: Experience DV: Salesperson performance	This research examines sales technology usage and its effects on two behavioral outcomes: adaptive selling and effort. CRM usage had a direct positive impact on adaptive selling. General support was found for the notion that experience moderates the relationship between CRM usage and adaptive selling.
Jaramillo and Grisaffe (2009) JPSSM	455 direct-selling salespeople and matched sales data (objective)	IV's: Customer orientation, adaptive selling DV's: Sales performance slope, sales performance intercept Control: Sales experience	This research examines the effect of customer orientation, adaptive selling, and experience on sales performance from both a static and longitudinal perspective. Latent growth modeling if used to find that adaptive selling has a direct effect on performance but does not show an impact on sales growth.

(Table cont'd)

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
Chai, Zhao, and Babin (2012) JPSSM	256 salespeople in the Chinese insurance sector	IV's: Goal orientations (Learning orientation and Proving orientation) Mediator: Perceived obsolescence DV: Adaptive selling	Goal orientation was found to be an important motivation factor that influences a salesperson's practice of adaptive selling.
Hughes, Le Bon, Rapp (2013) JAMS	48 salespeople; 686 customers (686 salesperson-customer dyads)	IV's: Customer Orientation, Salesperson Extra Role Behavior, Relationship Quality Mediators: Competitive Intelligence, Information Use Behaviors Moderators: Adaptive Selling DV's: Perceived Value, Share of Wallet, Profit Margin on Sales	Adaptive selling positively moderates the relationship between competitive intelligence and information usage. The study found that adaptive sellers responded to incoming information, adjusted the selling approach, and tailored messages to better suit their situation.
Chakrabarty, Brown, and Widing (2013) JPSSM	241 salespeople	IV's: Supervisory selling behaviors, salesperson selling behaviors (Adaptive selling & customer oriented selling) Mediator: Trust Moderator: Conflict DV: Sales outcomes	Adaptive selling was found to enable salespeople to develop trust in their customers. This led to improved sales performance and customer loyalty. However, adaptive selling could not entirely assuage the negative effects of relational conflict.
Wong et. al (2015) IMM	113 team leaders and 285 team members	IV: Service leadership Mediator: Adaptive selling DV's: Customer orientation, In-role performance, service recovery performance	Adaptive selling was found to mediate the relationship between service leadership and quality customer service. Adaptive selling was positively and significantly correlated with in-role performance, customer orientation, service leadership, and service recovery performance.
Goad and Jaramillo (2014), JPSSM	12,790 salespeople	IV's: Customer orientation, selling orientation, learning orientation, performance orientation Mediators: Adaptive selling Moderator: customer type DV: Job performance Control: Experience	Adaptive selling was shown to mediate the impact of both selling orientation and customer orientation.

(Table cont'd)

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
Chen and Jaramillo (2014) JPSSM	Dyadic data 150 customers matched with 25 salespeople	IV's: Adaptive selling Moderator: Emotional intelligence Mediator: Salesperson-owned loyalty DV's: Loyalty to the service provider, word-of-mouth Controls: customer satisfaction, customer perceived value. Relationship enhancing activities, relationship length	This research examined how emotional intelligence affects salespeople's adaptive selling behavior and customer outcomes. Regulation of emotions was found to moderate the adaptive selling/salesperson-owned loyalty relationship. Adaptive selling had a significant effect positive effect on salesperson-owned loyalty.
Chakrabarty, Widing, and Brown (2014) JPSSM	241 salespeople	IV: Adaptive selling Moderator: Closed Influence tactics DV's: Short-term sales goals, long-term sales goals	Closed-influence tactics were found to enhance the positive effect of adaptive selling on short-term salesperson goals, but these tactics weakened the positive effect of adaptive selling on long-term salesperson goals.
Wang, Wang, and Hou 2016 (Social Behavior and Personality)	254 salespeople	IV's: Emotional Labor (Deep Acting, Surface Acting) Mediators: Adaptive Selling DV's: Performance	Salespersons' deep acting was positively related to adaptive selling behavior and job performance, whereas salespersons' surface acting was negatively related to adaptive selling behavior and job performance. In addition, adaptive selling behavior partially mediated the relationship between emotional labor strategies and job performance.
Rippe et al. (2016) JPSSM	Study 1: 118 US buyers 97 Russian buyers Study 2: 441 US buyers 347 Indian buyers	(Used structured survey/scenario methodology and ANOVA) Manipulated Variable: Perceived Adaptive Selling (high/low) IV's: perceived buyer-seller information differential: (advantage/disadvantage/information parity) Country type: (emerging/developed)	Makes theoretical contribution by demonstrating the relationship between customer perceptions of adaptive selling behavior and sense-making. Results showed that customer perceptions of adaptive selling varied based on differential conditions of buyer-seller information.

(Table cont'd)

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
Limbu et al. (2016) Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing	422 pharmaceutical sales reps	IV's: Perspective taking empathy, empathic concern, nonverbal immediacy Mediator: Adaptive selling DV's: Outcome performance and relationship performance	Adaptive selling behavior was found to mediate the effect of perspective taking empathy and empathic concern on relationship performance. The impact of empathy on outcome performance was not significant through adaptive selling behavior.
Agnihotri, Gabler, Itani, Jaramillo, and Krush (2017) JPSSM	162 matches salesperson-customer dyads	IV: Sales-Service Ambidexterity Mediators: Adaptive selling, Role conflict Moderator: Customer Demandingness DV: Customer satisfaction with the salesperson Control: Sales experience	Sales-service ambidexterity was found to positively impact adaptive selling behavior. This relationship was moderated by customer demandingness.
Yurova et al. (2017) Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	340 global omni-channel consumers	IV's: Interactive Adaptive selling, non-interactive adaptive selling, Initial purchase intention Moderators: Product type DV: Purchase intention	This research distinguishes between interactive and non-interactive adaptive selling and uses a consumer sample to evaluate the effects of adaptive selling behaviors on global omni-channel consumers. Both non-interactive and interactive adaptive selling behaviors were found to have a positive relationship with purchase intentions, but the effects differed by product type.

The importance of the adaptive selling strategy/behavior is evidenced by the wide range of different studies employing the variable and the consistently positive effects of adaptive selling on various sales-related and customer-related outcomes. Of the forty-five papers outlined in Table 2.1, two of the papers were strictly conceptual and built the foundations of the construct, three of the papers were scale development or analysis of existing scales used to measure adaptive selling, and one of the papers was a qualitative study which examined managerial opinions of the newly emerging variable. Twenty-eighty of the papers in Table 2.1 showed strong positive results of adaptive selling on various measures of salesperson success, one of the

papers showed negative results of adaptive selling behavior (Keillor et al. 2000), and three of the papers showed mixed results (Pettijohn et al. 2000; Jaramillo & Grisaffe 2001; & Limbu et al. 2006). One of the papers showed results which were neither overtly positive, negative, or mixed. This paper simply elucidated gender differences between male and female salespeople's enactment of adaptive selling behavior (Goolsby et al. 1992).

The overall positive relationship between selling behaviors such as adaptive selling and sales performance has been extensively studied in sales management literature (Franke and Parke 2006; Chakrabarty et. al 2014; Jaramillo et al. 2009). Empirical evidence for adaptive selling suggests a strong positive relationship between this selling behavior and sales performance (Verbeke et al. 2011). Highly adaptive salespeople have the unique competency during and across customer interactions to alter their selling behaviors based on the nature of the selling situation (Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan 1986). Both theoretical (Weitz et al. 1986) and empirical (Jaramillo et al. 2007) support for this phenomenon has been demonstrated in the sales literature.

This variable is included in the conceptual model to expand the body of knowledge on adaptive selling and test the selling behavior against other salesperson strategies and behaviors. The specific scale used to test adaptive selling behavior comes from Chen and Jaramillo's (2014) scale. The adaptive selling literature review illuminates the reasons for utilizing this important sales strategy in this dissertation. For the conceptual model of this dissertation adaptive selling was measured using this established scale which meets appropriate psychometric criteria for rigor (Robinson et al 2002; Spiro and Weitz 1990; Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan 1986).

2.3. Customer-Oriented Selling Behavior

The final sales strategy which appears as an antecedent variable in the conceptual model is customer-oriented selling behavior. By definition, highly customer-oriented salespeople excel at inferring the beliefs, desires, and intentions of customers (Chakrabarty 2014). Customer-oriented salespeople inherently possess a broad perspective of the selling situation since they must identify customer needs, present solutions to satisfy those needs, and collaboratively handle objections and disagreements (Homburg et al. 2011). Customer-oriented selling behavior has been empirically shown to enhance customer satisfaction through a leveraging of customer knowledge (Homburg et al. 2009). The positive relationship between customer-oriented selling behavior and performance has been previously demonstrated in sales literature (Martin and Bush 2006; Franke and Park 2006; Jaramillo et al. 2007) and customer-oriented salespeople have proven to be important to the success of a variety of sales organizations (Brown et al. 2002; Stock & Hoyer 2005). A compilation of past findings pertaining to customer-oriented selling follows in Table 2.2. A summary of takeaways from Table 2.2 is available in the appendix.

Table 2.2. Literature Review of Customer-Oriented Selling

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
Flaherty et al. (1999) JPSSM	402 national sales reps	IV's: Financial orientation discrepancy, customer orientation discrepancy, perceived financial orientation, desired financial orientation, perceived customer orientation Mediators: Desired customer orientation, role conflict, role ambiguity DV: Customer-oriented selling performance	Salesperson's perceived customer value orientation of the firm increased customer-oriented selling performance while role conflict and role ambiguity constrained customer-oriented selling performance.

(Table cont'd)

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
Franke and Park (2006) JMR	Combines findings from 155 samples of more than 31,000 salespeople	Random effects meta-analysis	ASB and selling experience had greater effects on salesperson performance than customer-oriented selling or gender. Customer oriented selling only increased self-rated performance.
Jaramillo et al. (2007) JPSSM	223 Ecuadorian salespeople and objective sales data	IV: Intrinsic motivation, initiative Mediator: Adaptive selling Moderator: Initiative DV: Objective job performance Control variables: Customer orientation, extrinsic motivation, experience	Salesperson initiative was found to strengthen the relationship between intrinsic motivation and adaptive selling. Results supported the notion that adaptive selling is a significant antecedent of objective salesperson performance. The effect of customer orientation on objective job performance was statistically nonsignificant.
Jaramillo and Grisaffe (2009) JPSSM	455 direct-selling salespeople and matched sales data (objective)	IV's: Customer orientation, adaptive selling DV's: Sales performance slope, sales performance intercept Control: Sales experience	This research examines the effect of customer orientation, adaptive selling, and experience on sales performance from both a static and longitudinal perspective. The researchers use latent growth modeling and find that CO has a nonsignificant direct effect on static initial-level aspects of sales performance.
Homburg et al. (2011) JM	Triadic data 56 sales managers, 195 sales representatives, and 538 customers	IV: Customer orientation Mediators: Attitude toward salesperson, attitude towards products DV: customer satisfaction, sales performance Moderator: Contextual influences	Found a curvilinear, inverted u-shaped effect of a salesperson's customer orientation on sales performance. Findings also revealed that the optimum level of customer orientation with regard to sales performance is higher for salespeople selling individualized products and in firms pursuing premium price strategy and in markets with a high degree of competition.
Chakrabarty, Brown, and Widing (2013) JPSSM	241 salespeople	IV's: Supervisory selling behaviors, salesperson selling behaviors (Adaptive selling & customer-oriented selling) Mediator: Trust Moderator: Conflict DV: Sales outcomes	Adaptive selling was found to enable salespeople to develop trust in their customers. This led to improved sales performance and customer loyalty. However, adaptive selling could not entirely assuage the negative effects of relational conflict. Customer-oriented selling mitigated the ill effects of conflict on customer trust.

(Table cont'd)

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
Kara et al. (2013) Journal of Medical Marketing	328 Turkish sales representatives	IV: Customer orientation, adaptive selling DV: Sales performance, satisfaction Controls: Experience, gender	Findings reinforced the consistently positive relationship between ASB and customer orientation. Customer orientation was significant with regard to sales performance, satisfaction, and ASB.
Chakrabarty, Widing, and Brown (2014) JPSSM	324 respondents from the insurance/risk management industry	IV's: Adaptive selling, customer orientation Mediators: Rapport building, creating a positive ambience interaction Moderator: Taking a bird's eye view DV's: Performance, detecting nonverbal cues	Salesperson's theory of mind moderated and mediated the effects of customer oriented selling behavior. Salespeople's ability to take a bird's-eye view moderated the effect of customer-oriented selling on sales performance.
Goad and Jaramillo (2014), JPSSM	12,790 salespeople	IV's: Customer orientation, selling orientation, learning orientation, performance orientation Mediators: Adaptive selling Moderator: customer type DV: Job performance Control: Experience	Adaptive selling was shown to mediate the impact of both selling orientation and customer orientation.
Bateman and Valentine (2015) JPSSM	Convenience sample of 280 adult consumers	IV: Salesperson customer orientation DV's: Evaluation of salesperson's ethical treatment, trust in salesperson, intention to purchase.	Relational selling approaches (i.e. customer-oriented selling) were found to increase three indicators of sales effectiveness.

(Table cont'd)

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
Gerlach, Rodiger, Stock, and Zacharias (2016) JPSSM	Multilevel model with 164 salespeople and 405 customers	IV: Team-member exchange, supervisor support, age-inclusive climate Mediators: Customer-oriented attitude, customer-oriented behavior DV's: Customer perceptions of salesperson empathy, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty Control: Age	Empathy as perceived by customers was found to be an important facilitator of the customer orientation-satisfaction relationship. Large age differences made customer-oriented attitude more important. Antecedents of customer-oriented attitude were team-member exchange and age-inclusive climate.
Hansen et al. (2016) JPSSM	123 respondents	IV: Customer orientation, selling orientation Mediators: Norms disconfirmation, distributive justice Moderators: Transgression type, recovery type DV: Betrayal, search for alternative suppliers	This research explores salesperson transgressions and found that customer orientation amplifies buyers' responses to the initial transgression. However, favorable salesperson perceptions of CO are beneficial in the context of the overall transgression and recovery episode.

Past literature has demonstrated a positive link between customer-oriented selling behavior and overall sales success. Of the twelve articles identified in Table 2.2, nine illuminated an overall positive effect of customer orientation on job performance and other measures of sales success. Two of the articles displayed a nonsignificant effect of customer orientation on performance, and one of the studies (Frank and Park 2006) found that customer orientation only increased self-rated salesperson performance.

Previous research indicates overall that selling behaviors such as customer-oriented selling influence the ways in which salespeople initiate and foster buyer-seller relationships (Chakrabarty et al. 2013). Specifically, customer-oriented selling has been previously linked to long-term customer satisfaction (Homburg et al. 2009) and was even found to explain over 60

percent of the variance in development of buyer-seller relationships (Williams and Attaway 1996; Williams 1998). It is for these key reasons and the overall positive relationship between customer orientation and sales performance that this variable is included in the dissertation.

This dissertation builds strongly on the work of Chakrabarty et al. (2013) who cite a lack of research on the interactions between selling behaviors like customer-oriented selling and relationship management variables like the ones which are included in the model's mediating mechanism. Chakrabarty et al. (2013) studied both adaptive selling behavior and customer-oriented selling behavior as they impacted trust in the buyer-seller relationship from the salesperson's perspective. The model employed in this dissertation extends the research of Chakrabarty et al. (2013) by introducing a third selling behavior, customer-directed extra role behavior, and by utilizing the customer perspective as the context of study. With this dissertation, it is possible to further the study of customer-oriented selling behavior by testing the value of this behavior in comparison with both adaptive selling behavior and customer-directed extra role behavior.

2.4. Customer-Directed Extra Role Behavior

The importance of service employees and salespeople in maintaining positive customer relationships is critical to a large variety of sales and business research (Bettencourt and Brown 1997). Much like salespeople, service employees of all types can uncover customer wants, needs, and expectations due to their close-proximity to customers (Netemeyer et al. 2005). Specifically, salespeople are in a unique position to make direct customer contact and maintain close personal relationships with their buyers. This close customer contact is the cornerstone of customer relationship management (CRM) and has been shown to positively impact customer retention (Parasuraman and Grewal 2000; Srinivasan, Anderson, and Ponnnavolu 2002), and profitability

(Ryals and Knox 2001; Sheth and Sisodia 2001). Strategies intended to bolster customer relationships are important as they can become a key factor influencing a customer's overall satisfaction with the firm (Schneider and Bowen 1999).

One such strategy deserving of exploration is Customer-Directed Extra Role Behavior. Customer-Directed Extra Role Behavior is defined as the “degree to which the service employee “goes the extra mile” in serving customers during the employee-customer interface (Netemeyer et al. 2005). While the definition captures a broad base of many different service employees, this research specifically applies the construct in the domain of salespeople. This represents an intersection of sales and services research. Services marketing is a newer domain of marketing research with research dating back to the late 1980's with the inception of the Service Quality scale (Parasuraman et al. 1988). An aggregation of past research on the services-borne Customer-Directed Extra Role Behavior variable is found in Table 2.3 below. A summary of key takeaways from Table 2.3 is available in the appendix.

Table 2.3. Literature Review of Customer-Directed Extra Role Behavior

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
Bettencourt and Brown (1997) Journal of Retailing	232 teller and customer service manager dyads	IV: Overall fairness Mediator: Job satisfaction DV: Job supervision, pay administration, work standards, pay rules, pay level, extra role customer service, cooperation, role-prescribed customer service	This research examines contact employee prosocial behaviors and finds that workplace fairness perceptions are important antecedents.
Bettencourt, Gwinner, and Meuter (2001) Journal of Applied Psychology	Study 1: 236 customer-contact employees Study 2: 144 contact employees	Hierarchical regression IV: Job satisfaction, POS, service orientation (offshoot of CERP), Empathy, Strategy richness, Trait richness DV: Organizational citizenship behavior	Service orientation, a tangential conceptualization of CERP was found to be a strong predictor of organizational citizenship behavior.

(Table cont'd)

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
Netemeyer et al. (2005) JM	Study 1: 320 customer surveys Study 2: 132 customers	IV: Work-family conflict, family-work conflict Mediators: Job stress, customer directed extra role performance, in-role performance DV: Customer purchase intention	Customer-directed extra role performance had a greater effect on customer purchase intentions than in role performance.
Jaramillo et al. (2009) JPSSM	501 salespeople	IV: Servant leadership Mediators: Adaptive selling, customer orientation, CERP DV: Outcome performance Moderator: Experience	Salespeople's perceptions of their managers' servant leadership relate to customer orientation and drive adaptive selling behavior, CERP behaviors, and sales performance outcomes.
Jaramillo et al. (2011) JPSSM	342 salespeople	IV: Role stress, working smart Mediators: Work overload, interpersonal conflict, job attitude, emotional exhaustion, job attitude DV: role conflict, role ambiguity, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, extra role performance, in role performance, turnover intention Control: Tenure, age, gender, number of coworkers	Results found that negative job attitudes are detrimental to the firm because they discourage extra role behaviors.

Customer-directed extra role behavior is a variable which stems from services literature and embodies a service employee's tendency to go above and beyond (Netemeyer et al. 2005). Netemeyer et al. (2005) represents the seminal and most highly-cited piece on the construct.

While this variable is not as highly studied as adaptive selling behavior, it is still of importance to this dissertation because of its inherently customer-centric definition and its reliance on customer engagement. Perhaps one of the greatest reasons why customer-directed extra role behavior is not as widely studied in the sales domain is due to the fact that it is heavily reliant on customers' perspectives which are not typical of many sales datasets. Of the five

examined articles in Table 2.2, four showed positive results of customer-directed extra role behavior. The fifth article (Bettencourt and Brown 1997) was an examination of prosocial employee behaviors (such as customer-directed extra role behavior) and identified important antecedents of these phenomena, citing that workplace fairness perceptions were critical for employee engagement in prosocial behaviors. Recent literature calls for an examination of job-related factors that affect customer service employee performance and customer evaluations (Netemeyer et al. 2005; Bettencourt and Brown 2003). Much like service employees, salespeople can enhance their firm's image by tapping into customer wants, needs, and expectations. Customer evaluations are contingent on the service employees with whom the customer interacts (Borman and Motowidlo 1993).

Netemeyer et al. (2005) suggest that customer-directed extra role behavior reflects the employees' extra efforts to take initiatives that improve service when they communicate with customers, as well as conscientious extra efforts to respond to customer concerns. Previous literature has demonstrated that service employee role-prescribed behavior has been found to positively affect customer satisfaction and loyalty (Bettencourt and Brown 1997; Maxham and Netemeyer 2003). Further, customer-directed extra role behavior has been found to positively affect customer perceptions of relationship quality as well as service quality through "delighting" customers and enhancing their intentions to repurchase (Schneider and Bowen 1999; Maxham and Netemeyer 2003).

Effective customer-directed extra role behavior requires that employees engage customers, patiently listen to their concerns, and quickly develop suitable resolutions (Netemeyer et al. 2005). This variable is included in the conceptual model because successfully fostering positive buyer-seller relationships has been widely attributed to sales success (Wang and

Netemeyer 2004). At all stages of the selling process, customer-directed extra role behavior can potentially enhance customer relationships and in turn, salesperson performance.

The compilation of past studies utilizing this variable indicate that positive outcomes have been previously established in a variety of research settings. This dissertation expands study of the customer-directed extra role behavior variable to the specific buyer-seller context and utilizes an established scale for the measure (Netemeyer et al. 2005).

2.5. Buyer-Seller Relationship Literature Review

The conceptual model of this dissertation offers a mediating mechanism of relational factors through which selling behaviors/strategies act to influence the perceived quality of the relationship. The basic connection between the defined selling behaviors/strategies on relationship quality is explained via these relational variables which best characterize the unique interaction between a salesperson(s) and his, her, or their buyer. While never considered collectively, these four variables comprise key factors which influence customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, customer likelihood to repurchase, and customer likelihood to defect (Granovetter 1985, Wagner & Benoit 2015). The links between the four relational variables and basic relationship outcomes are illuminated in the pages that follow.

The selection of these four mediating variables provide a linkage between the aforementioned selling strategies and behaviors and the relationship quality outcome variable. These four mediators were selected based upon their ability to provide insight into the operating mechanism of the selling strategies and behaviors and the perceived quality of interactions. It is believed that relational aspects measured by the mediating mechanism will explain how customer perceptions of salesperson strategies and behaviors will impact the perception of overall relationship quality. While the four variables selected represent various aspects of a

relationship, it is important to note that relationships are infinitely nuanced. To capture and measure every single subtlety of a complex relationship is not possible and as such this research study had to settle on four distinct relational variables for use in the model. This mediating mechanism of relationship variables is in no way intended to be wholly encompassing of every intricacy within a relationship but is rather intended as a way to understand specific aspects of a relationship which are held as important.

While there were other relationship-based variables included in the data collection, not all of them were included within the conceptual model for the following reasons:

- Not all of the measured relationship variables achieved adequate reliability statistics and were subject to problematic measurement.
- There were theoretical reasons for excluding certain relationship variables because they had no prior literature to attest to their linkage with the strategies/behaviors under study.
- Certain relationship-based variables were not related to the theoretical framework of social exchange theory and were as such excluded from the final model.

To compel study of these specific relationship-based variables this dissertation uses social exchange theory as a framework. Social exchange theory posits that relationships proceed positively and effectively only when the benefits of resource exchange continue to be valuable to both parties within the relationship (Wagner & Benoit 2015). These perceived relationship benefits are influenced by key relational factors—empathy of the salesperson, reliability of the salesperson, value co-creation with the salesperson, and communications with the salesperson.

Salesperson empathy is defined as “an individual’s perception that another person demonstrates that s/he both feels and understands the other individual’s situation” (Plank et al.

1996), and more broadly as “the ability to identify and understand the other person’s feelings, ideas, and situation” (Futrell 1988). Salesperson reliability is defined as “a sense of duty toward meeting goals or the extent to which a salesperson makes sure that promised deadlines are met” (Parasuraman et al. 1988; Stock & Hoyer 2005). Value co-creation is defined as “the integration of resources during interactions between buyers and sellers” (Jaakkola and Hakanen 2013). And finally, salesperson communication is defined as “formal or informal transference of thoughts, opinions, and information between partners” (Anderson and Narus 1990).

These four variables are included in the model as representative of critical relational factors which influence the quality of the buyer-seller relationship. Being that relationships as a whole are highly complex, infinitely nuanced, and at times enigmatic, it is impossible to measure every discrete factor which impacts a relationship. However, it is believed that the inclusion of these four distinct variables offers a rich picture of several influencing variables which impact customer-salesperson relationships.

Granovetter (1985) proposed “implied social contracts” which allow relationships to grow and develop meaningfully. Past studies have found that customer perceptions of relationship value mediate the effects of both economic and social resources on the quality of the relationship (Wagner & Benoit 2015). The four mediating relational factors proposed in the model represent a sample of customer value perceptions regarding relationship quality. Additionally, Palmatier et al. (2006) in their meta-analysis of relationship marketing literature found that the mediating influence of relationship value and variables which test this value has not received due attention in business-to-business research contexts. The meta-analysis of Palmatier et al. (2006) provides further motivation for the study and uncovers an underlying gap in the sales literature which can be addressed.

Because economic exchange is embedded within the core structure of the buyer-seller relationship, it is important to study customer perspectives on the interaction with their salesperson and gain insight into their viewpoints. This provides further credence for the use of a customer sample in this study.

2.6. Customer-Perceived Mediation Mechanism

It is important to note that the four relational variables which will be presented within the mediation of the model are measured based on customer perceptions. This indicates that the mediating mechanism is made manifest by the customers' perception that their salesperson is empathetic, reliable, co-creates value, and communicates. Selection of these four relational dimensions represented in the mediation of this model was based on past literature in three distinct streams of academic literature: customer relationship management, service quality, and sales strategy. An overview of this mediation mechanism is included here, followed by more extensive tables which illuminate past research on each individual variable.

The work of Gerlach et al. (2016) found that empathy (as perceived by customers) was a highly influential factor in the relationship between customer-orientation and satisfaction. Because the proposed model operationalizes empathy in a similar capacity, it is possible to extend the work of Gerlach et al. (2016) to include tests of salesperson empathy alongside additional selling strategies and relational variables. This extant research provides credence to the study at hand as the authors point out that salesperson empathy is a variable which has not received considerable attention as an intervening mechanism in the buyer-seller relationship paradigm (Gerlach et al. 2016).

Additionally, inclusion of salesperson empathy stems from the concept of service quality popularized in the work of Parasuraman et al. (1985; 1991). Parasuraman et al. (1985; 1991) identified empathy as a key factor in positively impacting the employee-customer interface. It is for these reasons that customer-perceived salesperson empathy is included within the relational mediating mechanism of the proposed model.

Customer-perceived salesperson reliability is also included as a relational factor in the mediating mechanism of the proposed model due in part to the service quality work of Parasuraman et al. (1985; 1991). Much like empathy, reliability was uncovered in these studies as a key factor in determining the quality of employee-customer interactions (Parasuraman et al. 1985; 1991). Stock and Hoyer (2005) additionally found that reliability increased the likelihood that a salesperson could perform customer-oriented behaviors such as responding to specific customer needs and following through on promises and deadlines made with customers. Because of salesperson reliability's established importance in the employee-customer interface, it is included in the mediating mechanism of the proposed model as a customer-perceived relationship variable.

Value co-creation is defined as the customer's active engagement in the joint value realization process (Holbrook 2006, pg. 212). Inclusion of this variable as a component of the relational mediating mechanism is indicative of the paradigm shift in the marketing concept towards service dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch 2004; 2008). This new dominant logic in marketing holds that value is co-created with consumers throughout the entirety of the customer interaction—not simply during the static point of exchange. This new logic emphasizes the importance of the long-term customer relationship and value co-creation is the pinnacle of such active customer-firm exchanges.

Social exchange theory provides a framework for understanding how the value co-created between partners and the benefits which that value bestows on partners influence behaviors in the partners' relationship and in turn, the success of the partners' relationship. Social exchange theory posits that benefits trigger implicit norms of reciprocity (Wetzel et al. 2014) which determine how partners in a relationship react and behave. When value co-creation is high, norms of reciprocity are triggered as perceived benefits become more salient and tangible for both members of the buyer-seller relationship (Wetzel et al. 2014). Because customer-perceived value co-creation is an important indicator of the relational partners' perceived satisfaction with the relationship, it is included within the mediating mechanism of the model.

The final variable which appears in the mediating mechanism of the proposed model is customer-perceived salesperson communication. Effective communication is a powerful component in determining the relative success of a relationship (Fisher, Maltz and Jaworski 1997). Frequent and high-quality communication has been linked to the establishment of closer and more productive inter-functional relationships (LeMeunier-FitzHugh & Piercy 2007). Effective communication is bidirectional, meaningful, and productive in reducing conflicts, improving understanding, and sharing ideas (LeMeunier-FitzHugh & Piercy 2007). It is for these reasons that customer-perceived communications are included as an important relational factor in the proposed mediating mechanism of the model.

2.7. Value Co-Creation

The co-creation of value is fostered by dynamic customer-firm interactions. Much attention has been paid to the growing power of the consumer in today's modern marketplaces and no longer are consumers passive participants in exchange (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). While consumers increasingly become more informed and seek more meaningful interactions

with the companies they patronize, value exchange becomes a critical function in the business environment (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). This is particularly true for salespeople who maintain close contact with customers. Value co-creation is defined as “the integration of resources during interactions between buyers and sellers” (Jaakkola and Hakanen 2013).

The notion of value co-creation originates in the process—the customers are active in the exchange and as such are co-creators of the value created by the exchange. This is driven by greater consumer-to-consumer communication and increased firm transparency (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). This puts tremendous weight on employees (such as salespeople) who maintain close relationships with customers and in turn become key touchpoints for value co-creation.

Value co-creation is defined as “The customer’s active engagement in a joint value realization process...[value is] an ‘interactive relativistic preference experience’, as it goes beyond a cognitive state of fixed value assessments, and instead comprises multiple dynamic phenomena revolving around customers’ activities and their interaction with service and product offerings” (Holbrook 2006, pg. 212).

Consumers are increasingly seeking greater value from their interactions with business organizations (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). Because of a salesperson’s considerable role in the buyer-seller relationship, they are uniquely suited to anticipate and respond to evolving customer needs and in turn, enhance value for these customers. The emerging view is that value is not embedded in the products or services offered by selling organizations, but that value is co-created through the integration of resources and during interactions between buyers and sellers

(Jaakkola and Hakanen 2013). Value co-creation is believed to mediate the relationship between salesperson selling strategies and behaviors and the perceived quality of the relationship interaction between salespeople and their customers. An established scale for value co-creation is utilized in the study (Narver and Slater 1990). Table 2.4 outlines key findings pertaining to value co-creation in extant literature. A summary of key takeaways from Table 2.4 is available in the appendix.

Table 2.4. Literature Review of Value Co-Creation

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
Walter, Ritter, Gemunden (2001); Industrial Marketing Management	200 firms	IV's: Direct and Indirect functions of a customer relationship DV: Supplier-perceived value	This study found that customer relationships contribute to the value perceived by the supplier. The authors uncovered a strong concentration on value for customers.
Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004); Journal of Interactive Marketing	Conceptual	Value co-creation	This paper examines value co-creation as a dominant theme for marketing practitioners and consumers today. The authors define value as shifting from the firm-/product-centric view toward a process view embedded in the consumer experience. Interaction between firm and consumer was cited as the locus of value co-creation and value extraction.
Baumann & Le Meunier-FitzHugh (2014); Journal of Marketing Management	Exploratory interviews with 6 organizations' sales personnel and their customers	Value co-creation (process and outcomes)	This study propelled research of value co-creation in the business to consumer context via exploratory qualitative work. Both customer and salesperson were found to take on distinct roles in the co-creation process. Commitment, establishment of equitable dialogue, and sharing interests were all identified as key characteristics of value co-creation.

Of the four mediating variables which comprise the relational mechanism of the conceptual model, value co-creation has the least empirical research attributed to it. One of the cited articles (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004) is a conceptual piece which builds the

foundations of the construct and another of the articles (Baumann & LeMeunier-FitzHugh 2015) is a qualitative piece which seeks to identify key characteristics of value co-creation. Clearly, this construct is deserving of further empirical study and requires more evidence to back its growing importance in the sales and services literature streams.

2.8. Salesperson Empathy

Establishment of a mediating mechanism for the conceptual model stems from literature in the domain of both services research, psychology research, and relationship marketing research. In characterizing the buyer-seller relationship it is important to use variables which adequately capture the relational interaction. One such variable seen often in the relationship marketing literature is empathy. The empathy construct is one which is well-defined in extant literature. First in the psychology discipline, empathy has been described as “one’s sensitivity to another’s current feelings and his verbal capacity to communicate this understanding in a language attuned to the other’s current feelings” (Traux and Carkhuff 1967). Personality psychologists have conceptualized empathy in such a way that higher levels of the construct yield stronger and more meaningful interpersonal relationships (Rychlak 1973). From the well-established psychology domain, the construct of empathy entered the sales literature.

Starting with early explorations by Tobolski and Kerr (1952), salesperson empathy is now recognized as a necessary component of successful buyer-seller relationships (Dawson, Soper, and Pettijohn 1992; Stock and Hoyer 2005; Gerlach et al. 2016). In the context of sales, Plank, Minton, and Reid (1996) define empathy as “an individual’s perception that another person demonstrates that s/he both feels and understands the other individual’s situation”. Similarly, Futrell (1988) cites that empathy is “the ability to identify and understand the other person’s feelings, ideas, and situation”, making “ability” a salient feature of the construct.

Another definition which introduces the concept of ability is found in Marks (1988). Marks (1988) states that empathy is “the ability to feel as another individual does and put oneself in the other’s position to appreciate his or her situation fully”.

Many sales researchers have drawn the parallel between empathy and successful selling (Greenberg and Greenberg, 1983; Sager and Ferris, 1986; Scheibelhut and Albaum, 1973). Sales effectiveness has been empirically shown to be influenced by the notion of empathy as early as Tobolski and Kerr (1952). Tobolski and Kerr (1952) demonstrated that the performance of a sample of car salesmen was directly related to their results on the Kerr and Speroff empathy instrument. Even when sales performance is not the focal dependent variable, salesperson empathy still holds substantial influence in determining the efficacy of various sales behaviors. Spiro and Weitz (1990) illustrated that when a salesperson possesses a certain degree of experience, empathy is strongly related to their adaptive selling abilities. The importance of empathy as it relates to selling abilities has been investigated and empirically shown in a litany of research studies (Kirkpatrick and Russ, 1976; Olshavsky, 1957; Saxe and Weitz, 1982).

Several features of empathy become clear as these various appearances of the construct are examined. Empathy hinges on interactions which take place between two or more people, making the construct’s applicability in relationship-driven settings highly prevalent. Specifically, the operation of empathetic behaviors in the context of sales and personal selling has been shown to hold dynamic impacts on customer perceptions (Dawson et al. 1992).

Sales performance, perhaps the most widely studied empirical outcome in sales research, has in fact been linked directly to the trait personality construct of empathy (Greenberg and Mayer 1964). In this study, an instrument to measure empathy was developed and empirically tested and shown to relate positively to sales performance. Greenberg (1976) goes on to argue

that the three most significant personality dynamics which predict sales performance are “empathy, ego drive, and ego strength”. Comer and Ding (1999) also replicated this compelling relationship between empathy and sales performance in their work.

Plank and Reid (2010) note that empathy can readily be influenced by the specific situation or selling context. It is therefore reasonable to project that empathy operates differently given unique selling scenarios. Rogers (1957) presented the finding that empathetic understanding in sales personnel make such salespeople better equipped to meet the needs of each customer’s unique viewpoint. This advantage is largely due to the employment of ideal sales techniques given the situational demands of the selling encounter.

Dawson (1992) offers a notable caveat in stating that interrelationship skills such as empathy tend to be absent during salesperson training and selection tasks, much to the detriment of the firm. This absence is unfortunate given that the importance of empathy as it relates to selling relationships has been previously established. It has long been shown that traits such as empathy are strongly linked to the promotion of positive interpersonal relationships between both clients and customers (Greenberg and Greenberg 1983).

Sager and Ferris (1986) discuss a necessity for salespeople to develop “sound” relationships with customers and clients. Part of this positive relational orientation rests of the salesperson’s trait empathy and empathetic sales behaviors. Dawson (1992) states that one of the key processes for enacting successful selling is developing an understanding of the needs of the customer.

Given the prior literature, it’s clear that a strong personal tendency to be empathetic can enable a salesperson to strengthen relational understanding. Selling relationships can in turn

become more successful and positive through higher levels of empathy. This is evidenced by the increased frequency of repeat sales, customer referrals, testimonials, and favorable word-of-mouth communications when a salesperson displays a decided tendency toward empathy (Dawson 1992). It is for these reasons that salesperson empathy is included in the conceptual model as a key relational component of the buyer-seller interaction and a fundamental unit of the mediating mechanism. An established scale measure of salesperson empathy from Stock and Hoyer (2005) is utilized in this study. Table 2.5 below highlights key findings regarding the salesperson empathy construct in extant literature with a summary provided in the appendix.

Table 2.5. Literature Review of Salesperson Empathy

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
Tobolski and Kerr (1952) Journal of Applied Psych	32 car salesmen	IV: Empathy DV: Sales effectiveness	Salesperson success was positively related to the car salesperson's results on the empathy test.
Dawson, Soper, and Pettijohn (1992); Psychology and Marketing	150 evaluator-subjects (recent purchasers)	IV's: Salesperson empathy DV's: Salesperson performance, Mean Commission Obtained, Mean Closing Ratio	Results contradicted a priori beliefs about empathy in the sales context. Empathy was not related in a linear manner to sales performance. When empathy was high, performance declined. The highest sales figures were found when a moderate level of empathy was present. Limitations of the exploratory study included the sample which was constrained only to new car salesmen.
Pilling and Eroglu (1994); JPSSM	484 buyers; 2x2x2 between-subjects experimental design	IV's: Salesperson empathy, professionalism, merchandise salability DV's: Likelihood of listening to future sales presentations, Likelihood of placing an order with the salesperson	Empathy had a significant positive impact on both likelihood to listen to future sales presentations and likelihood to place an order with the hypothetical salesperson, regardless of the level of professionalism of the salesperson.

(Table cont'd)

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
McBane (1995); Psychology and Marketing	154 salespeople	IV's: Empathic concern, perspective taking, emotional contagion DV: Salesperson performance Moderator: Controlling behaviors	The study found that the unidimensional construct of empathy did not have a significant interaction. The multidimensional construct of empathy had one interaction term which was significant. No significant main effect was found for either dimension of empathy.
Stock and Hoyer (2005); JAMS	115 salespeople, 222 customers, 173 dyads	IV: Salespeople's Customer-oriented Attitude Mediator: Salespeople's customer-oriented behavior DV: Customer satisfaction Moderators: Empathy, reliability, expertise Control: Length of relationship	The relationship between salespeople's customer-oriented attitude and customer-oriented behavior was found to be stronger when the empathy of the salesperson was high. The chi-square differences were significant at the 5% level, indicating that salespeople who were more empathic were also more powerful as communicators of their customer-oriented attitudes.
Aggarwal, Castleberry, Ridnour & Shepherd (2005); JMTP	162 buyers	IV: Empathy Mediators: Satisfaction with the salesperson, salesperson listening, trust in the salesperson DV: Anticipation of future interaction	A strong positive relationship between empathy, salesperson listening, trust in the salesperson, and satisfaction with the salesperson was uncovered. Trust in and satisfaction with the salesperson were found to be positively related to expectations of future interaction with the salesperson.
Spaulding & Plank (2007); The Marketing Management Journal	321 new vehicle shoppers	IV: Perceived empathy Mediator: Perceived trust DV: Sales effectiveness	The study uncovered a strong positive relationship between consumer perceptions of a salesperson's empathetic behavior and their overall evaluations of that salesperson. Additionally, the findings suggested that empathy was more important in initial business dealings with a salesperson but that established buyer-seller relationships were more impacted by trust.

(Table cont'd)

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
Agnihotri, Krush, & Singh (2012); Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing	125 salespeople, 15 salesperson-manager dyads	IV's: Empathy proneness, guilt proneness Mediators: Relationship performance, helping behaviors DV: Sales performance	Empathy proneness was positively related to helping behaviors which were focused on assisting other salespeople. The results suggested that a salesperson's capacity for empathy did not always transmit directly into customer-based behaviors.
Agnihotri & Krush (2015); JPSSM	95 salesperson-sales manager dyads	IV: Salesperson empathy Mediator: Ethical behaviors Moderator: Salesperson trust in manager DV: Sales performance	The partially mediated model resulting from this study demonstrated that empathy occupies dual roles in the salesperson. Empathy was found to strongly influence salespeople toward ethical behaviors while a significant direct path between empathy and sales performance was revealed.
Itani & Inyang (2015); International Journal of Bank Marketing	25 salespeople, 150 customers	IV: Empathy Mediator: Listening Moderator: Felt Stress DV: Relationship quality with the bank	The study found that buyer perceptions of salespeople's listening behavior mediated the relationship between customers' perceptions of salesperson's empathy and relationship quality with the bank. This study is of interest because it is the one of the first which looks at a relationship-oriented DV.
Gerlach, Rodiger, Stock, and Zacharias (2016); JPSSM	164 salespeople, 405 customers	IV's: Team-member exchange, supervisor support, age-inclusive climate Mediators: Customer-oriented attitude, customer-oriented behavior DV's: Customer perceptions of salesperson's empathy, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty	The multilevel model found that salesperson empathy as perceived by customers is a significant influencer of the customer orientation and customer satisfaction relationship.

Table 2.5 above outlines the key findings on the empathy construct in the domain of sales. Of the eleven studies examined, nine showed significant positive effects of empathy on sales performance and various measures of customer satisfaction with a salesperson. Two of the

studies showed mixed results: Dawson et al. (1992) found an inverted u-shaped effect of salesperson empathy and McBane (1995) found just one of the empathy constructs tested had a single significant interaction term while all others were nonsignificant. These overall positive effects provide further motivation for employing the empathy construct in the study at hand.

It is important to note that many previous usages of the empathy variable conceptualized the variable as an independent variable (the exception being the Gerlach et al. 2016 study which utilized customer-perceptions of salesperson empathy as a dependent variable). In this research the variable is proposed as a mediator because in the context of this dissertation and the conceptual model at hand the research seeks to understand not simply the effects of empathy but rather what causes empathy to happen and to be perceived by customers. Therefore, empathy in this conceptual model is a mediator because this research seeks to understand how empathy as a dimension of this set of relationship mediators is affected by the antecedent variables.

2.9. Salesperson Reliability

Firms are continuing to advance close customer-supplier relationships in line with the changing dynamics of the marketing climate (Bitner 1995). One construct which has emerged from this change in the marketing concept is salesperson reliability. Defined as “a sense of duty toward meeting goals or the extent to which a salesperson makes sure that promised deadlines are met” (Parasuraman et al. 1994; Stock & Hoyer 2005), many studies have uncovered a positive link between employee reliability and customer outcomes (Carman 1990; Cronin and Taylor 1992). While this definition appears to be rather narrow in that it mainly focuses on meeting deadlines, the overall sense of goal orientation is important to successful business relationships. Smith and Barclay’s (1997) definition of role competence “the degree to which partners perceive each other as having the skills, abilities, and knowledge necessary for effective

task performance” may be a better alternative as it includes within its definition more aspects of reliability than merely a sense of consistency. Reliability in this definition is also a generator of trust—a critical aspect of both business and personal relationships. As such, a broader definition of salesperson reliability may be in order for future research.

Prior studies have identified numerous positive outcomes of employee reliability (Carman 1990; Cronin and Taylor 1992). Salesperson reliability is included in the conceptual model because a mediating effect of reliability is proposed between salesperson selling behaviors and customer relationship outcomes. Salesperson reliability should increase the likelihood that a salesperson can transfer his or her customer-oriented behaviors into positive customer-oriented attitudes and outcomes. Highly reliable salespeople have been found to be better able to consistently perform customer-oriented behaviors (Stock and Hoyer 2005). This is consistent with recent work in relationship marketing literature as well as service quality literature (Amyx and Bhuian 2009).

Salesperson reliability is included in the conceptual model because of its establishment as a relationship-oriented variable found to have strong positive outcomes on selling success. Table 2.6 below highlights important findings pertaining to salesperson reliability found in extant literature. A summary of key takeaways from Table 2.6 is available in the appendix.

Table 2.6. Literature Review of Salesperson Reliability

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
Smith & Barclay (1997); JM	103 dyadic selling partner relationships	IV: Organizational Differences (Reputations, job stability, strategic horizons, control systems, goals) Mediator: Mutual perceived trustworthiness (character, role competence, judgment, motives and intentions) DV's: Mutual trusting behaviors (relationship investment, influence acceptance, communication openness, control reduction, forbearance opportunism), Perceived task performance, mutual satisfaction	Reliability is operationalized in this study as role competence, the degree to which partners perceive each other as having the skills, abilities, and knowledge necessary for effective task performance. This closely mirrors the salesperson reliability construct operationalized in the current proposal. A CFA found support for role competence as a common character/motives dimension in the salesperson-buyer relationship.
Sirdeshmukh, Singh, and Sabol (2002); JM	378 consumers	IV's: Operational competence, operational benevolence, problem-solving orientation Mediators: 2 dimensions of trust DV's: Value, loyalty	Operational competence had a significant, direct effect on trust in the retailing and airline contexts. There was some support found for the asymmetric effects of such trustworthy behaviors as operational competence on value and loyalty.
Lau & Chin (2003); Journal of B2B Marketing	150 salespeople in Singapore	IV's: Moral philosophies, organizational culture, motivational orientation DV: Trustworthiness of salespeople (Character, commitment, conviction, competence, courage)	This study provides validation for competence/reliability as an important dimension of trustworthiness in buyer-seller relationships. Conviction was also perceived as part of competence.
Amyx and Bhuian (2009); JPSSM	116 customers	IV's: Salesperson service performance (Reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangibility) DV's: Service satisfaction, brand loyalty	This study was exploratory in nature and attempted to assess the validity of a salesperson service performance scale. Reliability was found to be a prominent factor of salesperson service performance in the scale development.

(Table cont'd)

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
Kharouf, Lund, Sakhon (2014); Journal of Services Marketing	420 service retail customers	IV's: Consistency, competence, benevolence, communication, integrity, value alignment Mediator: Trustworthiness DV's: Trust, attitudinal loyalty, behavioral loyalty	Competence or reliability was found to be a critical aspect of building trustworthiness among service retail customers. Trustworthiness ultimately led to customer trust which had positive outcomes for both behavioral and attitudinal loyalty.

All of the five studies on salesperson reliability in Table 2.6 above showed some degree of positive influence of reliability on customer outcomes such as trust as well as salesperson performance. One of these studies (Smith and Barclay 1997), utilized a confirmatory factor analysis to underscore reliability as an important dimension in the salesperson-buyer relationship. This variable is one of the lesser studied variables in business research, as evidenced by its smaller literature review table. As salesperson reliability is an under-researched construct this dissertation intends to bolster empirical studies of this variable as it is deserving of greater attention.

2.10. Salesperson Communications

Communication is an important factor in both business and interpersonal relationships. Enhanced communication between customers and salespeople enhance value, and the importance of meaningful communication in establishing successful relationships is a widely accepted notion even outside of business functions. Communication is defined as both formal and informal transference of thoughts, opinions, and information between partners (Anderson and Narus 1990). The quality of communication is important because effective communication leads to fewer conflicts and problems between parties in a business relationship (Zhang and Zhang 2014). Communication has also been shown to yield stronger ties between salespeople and

buyers (Williams, Spiro, and Fine 1990). Adequacy, timeliness, openness, and accuracy are all critical components of effective communication (Zhang and Zhang 2014).

Effective communication across boundaries is a key construct in collaboration (Kotler et al. 2006). Souder (1988) noted that managers often wish to improve relationships between service employees and customers by increasing contact through information flow and frequency of communication. Communications are a key aspect of relational development and have been shown to produce positive customer outcomes (Kohli 1990). Communication is critical for strengthening the relationship between a salesperson and their customers and is thus an appropriate relationship-oriented mediating variable of the antecedent selling strategies and behaviors. Communications are measured in this research study with an established scale with adequate psychometric properties (LeMeunier-FitzHugh and Piercy 2007). Key findings related to salesperson communication are presented in Table 2.7 with a summary available in the appendix.

Table 2.7. Literature Review of Salesperson Communications

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
Smith & Barclay (1997); JM	103 dyadic selling partner relationships	IV: Organizational Differences (Reputations, job stability, strategic horizons, control systems, goals) Mediator: Mutual perceived trustworthiness (character, role competence, judgment, motives and intentions) DV's: Mutual trusting behaviors (relationship investment, influence acceptance, communication openness, control reduction, forbearance opportunism), Perceived task performance, mutual satisfaction	Communication openness as operationalized in this study is defined as the formal and informal sharing of timely information between two relationship participants and relates to disclosure of plans, expectations, goals, and motivations. This definition is in step with the current research's operationalization of communications. Communication was found to form a combined construct with relationship investment as the two factors were closely related.
Johlke and Duhan (2001); JPSSM	318 salespeople	IV's: Sales Manager Communication practices (frequency, informal mode, indirect content, bidirectional) DV's: Salesperson Communication and job outcomes (communication satisfaction, job satisfaction, organizational commitment) Mediator: Sales force communication environment (communication quality)	This study evaluated three competing models of sales force communication. Tangentially related to buyer-seller communications operationalized in the current proposal, sales force communication was best modeled by sales manager communication practices, sales force communication environment, and salesperson communication and job outcomes. Higher sales manager communication practices were positively associated with salesperson perceptions of communication quality. Communication quality was found to be positively related to salesperson's satisfaction with communication. This communication quality was found to have a positive influence on job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

(Table cont'd)

Author(s) and journal	Sample and data source	Variables used	Key Findings
LeMeunier-FitzHugh and Piercy (2007); JPSSM	146 UK-based organizations in B2B markets	IV's: Management Attitudes toward coordination Mediators: Market intelligence, communications, organizational learning, interdepartmental conflict DV's: Collaboration between sales and marketing, business performance	This study found that improvement of communications between sales and marketing departments in an organization was an important antecedent of effective collaboration between these two departments.

Table 2.7 outlines three studies wherein communication was found to have some positive effect on sales/business relationships. In Smith and Barclay (1997), communication had a positive impact on relationship investment. Johlke and Duhan (2001) closely examined communication quality and found positive effects on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. And finally, LeMeunier-FitzHugh and Piercy (2007) found that improved communications led to more effective collaboration between organizational departments. Much like value co-creation, salesperson communications is an understudied variable in sales research which is deserving of more empirical backing. The present research attempts to fulfill this need for more empirical evidence to support the importance of communication in the sales context.

2.11. Relational and Objective Outcome Variables

While much sales research typically utilizes objective financial measures of salesperson performance for outcome variables (Schrock et al. 2016), this dissertation seeks to employ multiple dependent variables which will uncover both a relational outcome of the model as well as an objective outcome of the model. Because the conceptual model is so entrenched in aspects

of the buyer-seller relationship, it was prudent to include a measure of the perceptions of quality of this relationship.

2.12. Perceived Quality of Interactions

Perceived quality of interactions refers to the degree to which buyers and sellers believe that their interactions are productive (Moorman et al. 1992). Stronger relationships between salespeople and customers are theorized to bring enhanced understanding of the individual customer context and, in turn, more productive interactions (Moorman et al. 1992; Peterson and Kerin 1980). This variable is appropriate for assessing the quality of the salesperson-customer relationship as perceived by the customer. The variable is measured using an established scale which meets minimum psychometric criteria for rigor (Moorman et al. 1992).

Past findings related to perceived quality of interactions go beyond the business discipline into applied psychology. Prior work in this field found that extended contact with two party members improved the quality of subsequent interactions between the party members (West and Turner 2014). Conversely, feelings of stress, anxiety, or other social threats were found to negatively impact the perceived quality of intergroup interactions (Dovidio et al. 2006). Similarly, West et al. (2015) found that physiological responses related to implicit associations made about persons with mental health disorders influenced the quality of interactions across different groups. In this experimental study, West et al. (2015) tested attitudes, avoidance behaviors, and ultimately perceived quality of interactions as a fundamental outcome of imagined contact with an outgroup.

In the business context, Moorman et al. (1992) identified perceived quality of interactions between marketing managers and marketing researchers as a key variable which was strongly

and significantly impacted by relationship trust and relationship involvement. The authors noted that higher levels of trust and deeper levels of involvement made managers more willing to share strategic information and hold longer discussions with marketing researchers. This propensity to share positively influenced the overall relationship between the two parties (Moorman et al. 1992). This study provides further credence for the use of the perceived quality of interactions variable as an appropriate outcome measure of relationship quality in the current model. Furthermore, Perceived Quality of Interactions is hypothesized to mediate the effect of the relational mechanism on the objective performance outcome variable.

The implementation of this variable in the context of business and sales is unfortunately limited—the most impactful piece for the present research is Moorman et al. (1992). The present conceptual model attempts to provide more empirical evidence for the importance of this variable in the specific context of sales.

2.13. Salesperson Performance

This dissertation employs the use of an objective financial measure of salesperson performance supplied by the participating firm. Net revenues achieved, percent-to-quota, and sales goal attainment are all appropriate variables to explore when considering the overall success of a salesperson and have all been used in past sales research (Schrock et al. 2016). The conceptual model proposes a linkage between the customer's perceived quality of the interaction and objective measures of selling success illuminated by firm-generated objective financial data.

The use of objective performance data as an outcome variable in sales research is well-established and accepted in the field (Goolsby et al. 1992; Marks et al. 1996; Jaramillo et al. 2009; Chakrabarty et al. 2013; Hughes et al. 2013; Limbu et al. 2016). Jaramillo et al. (2009)

note that many empirical studies in sales rely on observations of objective sales performance. The use of an objective financial measure allows greater insight for practitioners as objective sales figures are tantamount to a firm's success. It is for these reasons that objective sales performance is included as an additional outcome variable in the proposed model. The objective financial measure selected for use in this research study is net revenue achieved by the salesperson for the year 2016. All salespeople included in the survey were employed for the duration of this year, and their net revenue achieved during this year was supplied by the firm. A matching procedure was used to link the provided customer data to their respective salesperson's net revenue achieved.

2.14. Control Variables

While the conceptual model attempts to capture the influence of specific sales strategies and behaviors on a set of relational mediating variables, there are certain extraneous factors that may influence the customers' overall perception of relationship quality with their salesperson. In order to control for these extraneous factors within the model, several control variables must be implemented. The use of control variables is well-documented in business and organizational research (Carlson and Wu 2012). Statistical control variables attempt to control for these outside influences on a model by mathematically partialling out variance associated with the control variable during calculation of the relationships between other variables (Carlson and Wu 2012). In the model at hand, control variables are utilized because they make some incremental contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable.

Salesperson experience and salesperson age are two variables which are commonly controlled for in sales research due to their demonstrable effects on objective financial performance measures. The literature shows a marked tendency for salesperson experience and

salesperson age to affect the objective financial performance of a salesperson (Bolander et al. 2015; Goad and Jaramillo 2014; Homburg et al. 2011; Jaramillo et al. 2007; Dalrymple and Strahle 1990), and it is for this reason that these two variables are included in the model as control variables for net revenue achieved.

A salesperson's net revenue achieved is affected by some factors outside of the scope of the relationship-based model. There are both theoretical and conceptual reasons for the inclusion of salesperson experience and salesperson age as control variables in the model. Even if a salesperson is able to maintain a productive and successful relationship with his/her customers, the objective financial measure of net revenue is still likely to be highly dependent upon age of the salesperson and years of experience working in sales. A salesperson who is older and who has more time spent in the field will likely have a larger customer portfolio and thus a higher net revenue achieved than a younger, less experienced salesperson. This is likely due to the sheer amount of time spent working in the industry. Even if a young and less experienced salesperson enjoys successful relationships with his/her customers, it is likely that they may not have a comparable net revenue to an older and more experienced counterpart.

Many sales-oriented articles which utilize an objective financial outcome measure attest to the importance of controlling for sales experience and salesperson age (Bolander et al. 2015; Goad and Jaramillo 2014; Homburg et al. 2011; Jaramillo et al. 2007; Giacobbe et al. 2006). Sales experience has known and well-documented impacts on a salesperson's job performance (Spiro and Weitz 1990; Siguaw and Honeycutt 1995; Rozell et al. 2004). This evidence provides empirical support for utilizing sales experience as a control variable within the model.

Similarly, the age of a salesperson has a discernible impact on salesperson objective financial performance (Hafer 1986; Dalrymple and Strahle 1990) and other sales-related

outcome variables (Lewin and Sager 2010). This provides empirical support for utilizing salesperson age as a relevant control variable within the model.

2.15. Moderation

Moderating variables are defined by Baron and Kenny (1986) as qualitative or quantitative variables thought to impact the direction and/or strength of the relationship between an independent/predictor variable and a dependent/criterion variable. Moderators have strong implications for mediating processes such as the one proposed in the relationship mechanism of the model at hand (Vancouver and Carlson 2014). While a mediating variable can be thought of as a mechanism for explaining a presumed relationship between two variables, a moderating variable is thought to impact the direction (positive/negative) or strength (high/low) of the relationships between variables (Vancouver and Carlson 2014; Baron and Kenny 1986). It is for these reasons that moderating variables must be considered as appropriate variables for study within the model.

The inclusion of moderating variables is important for the efficacy of this dissertation because certain relational factors are theorized to either enhance or detract from the customer-seller relationship. When the subject of study is as complex and multilayered as customer-seller relationships, it is important to include moderating variables to gain the most thorough picture of the effects at hand. In Schrock et al. (2016)'s meta-analysis of the *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, a noted trend of model complexity increasing over time was noted. Part of this trend towards greater model complexity can be seen with the inclusion of more moderating variables in empirical sales studies.

Two different moderators are proposed which may impact the conceptual model at both an individual customer level and a salesperson-customer relationship level. Although salespeople may be adept at employing relationship-enhancing strategies and behaviors and may indeed exhibit positive relationship dimensions, customer characteristics may in fact dampen the effects of these behaviors on the customers' overall perceptions of relationship quality. It is for these reasons that the inclusion of moderating variables was deemed necessary for the conceptual model.

2.16. Customer Demandingness

While the above-stated relational elements are thought to bolster the salesperson-buyer interaction and enhance performance, certain customer characteristics may in fact detract from this relationship and in turn, diminish the effects of the selling strategies and behaviors. The first variable intended to account for these effects is customer demandingness. Customer demandingness is defined as the level of buyers' expectations and needs according to various elements of the product or service (Wang and Netemeyer 2002). Not all customers are created equal, and some buyers do prove more challenging for salespeople to handle. When buyers exhibit a high degree of customer demandingness, it may be more difficult for salespeople to meet the customers' lofty requirements or unique needs for the product or service offering (Wang and Netemeyer 2002), even if the salespeople are actively engaging in positive sales strategies and behaviors. Additionally, customers who believe themselves to display a high level of demandingness may be less likely to positively respond to the various selling strategies and behaviors exhibited by salespeople, and therefore less likely to perceive enhanced relational benefits.

The existence of highly demanding customers has called for salespeople to bolster their problem-solving and value-providing professional skills (Banin et al. 2016; Jaramillo et al. 2013). While some salespeople may rise gracefully to this occasion, it is believed that overall salespeople will find these customers more difficult to deal with and their selling strategies may be less effective. Customer demandingness may create a negative moderating effect on the relationship between salesperson strategies and the mediating mechanism of customer relationship dimensions. It is believed that the moderating effect will occur at this segment of the model because the customer demandingness variable is at the individual-level and the impacts of high customer demandingness are believed to be most prevalent between the individual's estimation of their salesperson's strategies and the individual's estimation of specific relationship quality dimensions.

Wang and Netemeyer (2002) find that the difficulty of tasks inherent in personal selling are a partial byproduct of such customer characteristics as level of demandingness. Additionally, their study provided evidence that customers who are highly demanding in terms of product/service expectations may be more difficult for salespeople to successfully serve. Further, Agnihotri et al. (2017) uncovered a moderating effect of customer demandingness on the relationship between sales-service ambidexterity and role conflict. The proposed model attempts to further the body of knowledge on customer demandingness by assessing its moderating effects on the relationship between sales strategies and behaviors and the customer relationship dimensions within the mediating mechanism of the conceptual model.

2.17. Level of Conflict

The level of conflict in a business relationship is contingent upon each party's perception that its interests, goals, expectations, or needs are being negatively impacted by the other party (Jap and Ganesan 2000). Level of conflict is a negatively-valenced variable and is believed to impede the success of the buyer-seller relationship. Level of conflict in the proposed model is believed to negatively moderate the relationship between customer relationship dimensions and the relationship quality outcome variable. There is much evidence which points to the notion that committed, fulfilled, and satisfactory relationships do not experience high levels of conflict (Boon and Holmes 1991; Holmes 1991; Morgan and Hunt 1994).

When a high level of conflict exists within the relationship, it may be more difficult to solve conflicts and differences of opinion expediently and effectively (Anderson and Narus 1990). Jap and Ganesan (2000) found that relationships characterized by high levels of commitment also experienced lower levels of conflict and increased levels of satisfaction. This application of level of conflict in a business relationship context provides further reason to test its moderating effects in the conceptual model. It is believed that level of conflict will moderate the relational segment of the model because it is conceptually a relationship-based variable, unlike the previous moderating variable, customer demandingness, which is an individual-level variable.

CHAPTER 3. CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Figure 3.1 below depicts the conceptual model for this research. The model was conceptualized based upon the three literature streams of interest: sales strategy, relationship marketing, and service quality. Further conceptual insight for this model is provided by the theoretical framework of social exchange theory.

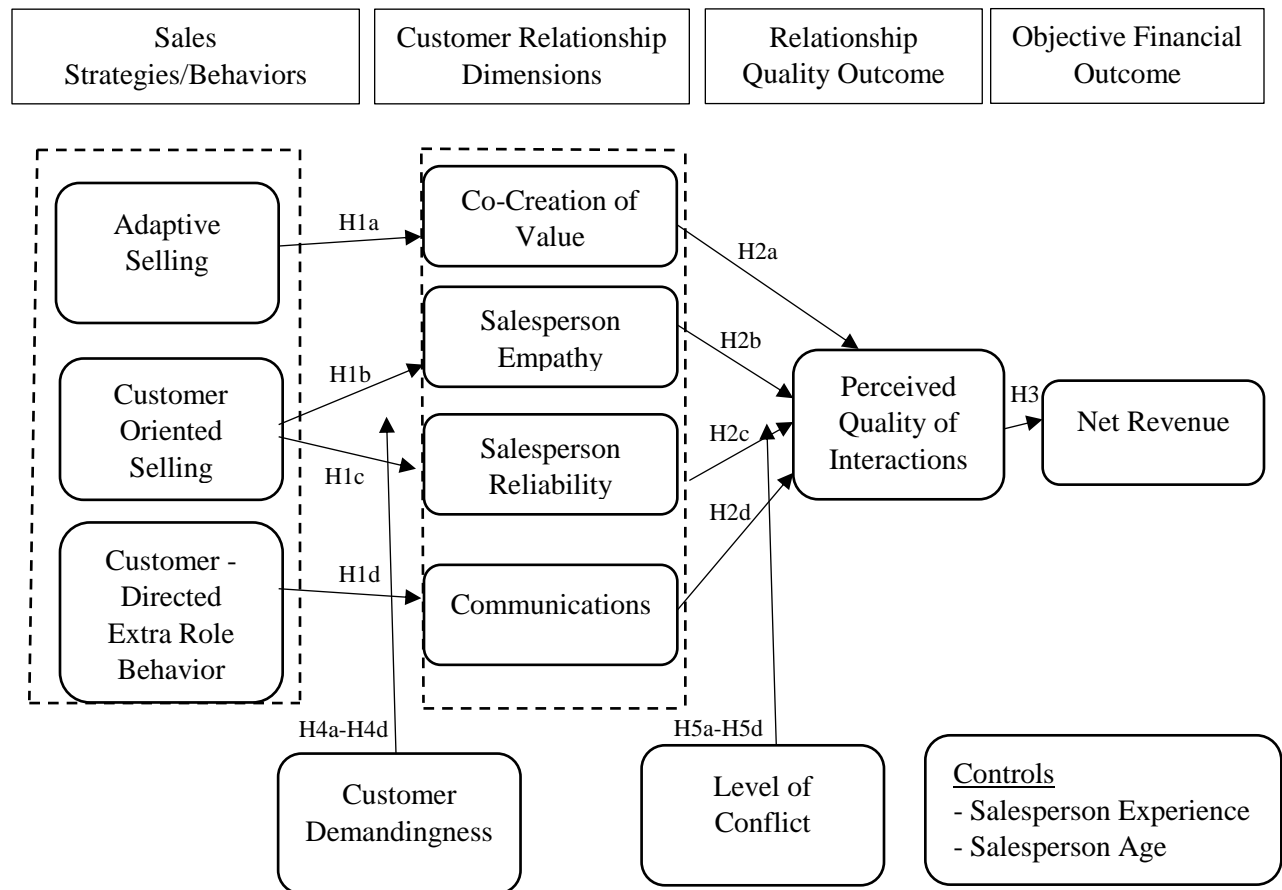


Figure 3.1. Conceptual Model

3.1. Theoretical Grounding

The conceptual model is compelled by social exchange theory, which has been periodically addressed throughout the literature review regarding certain variables and relationships. Social

exchange theory is an appropriate theoretical framework for understanding how customers will respond to sales strategies and tactics (Wetzel et al. 2014). Social exchange theory has a rich history throughout academic literature (Blau 1964; Homans 1974; Thibaut and Kelley 1959) and is embedded within a mapping of different norms—most notably the norms of reciprocity and governance.

In using social exchange theory, this research can uncover how parties who engage in repeated exchange behaviors (i.e. interactions over time between customers and their salespeople), respond to actual and perceived relational benefits with their exchange partners (Wetzel et al. 2014, Blau 1964). The proposed model relies on the notion that sales strategies enacted by salespeople will be perceived in the eyes of customers as beneficial to the buyer-seller relationship and will ultimately result in better perceived quality of interactions and sales performance. The benefits of these strategies in the eyes of customers are made manifest by the positive objective financial sales outcomes driven by buyers. When salespeople enact selling strategies that bolster their relationships with customers, the norms of reciprocity dictate that customers will respond in-turn by reciprocating greater sales and higher rates of repurchase (Wetzel et al. 2014).

3.2. Hypotheses Development for Selling Strategies

The first hypothesis relates to the selling strategy of adaptive selling behavior. Adaptive selling throughout previous literature has demonstrably proven to provide concrete benefits to the exchange relationship (Kidwell et al. 2007; Wong et al. 2015). The concrete benefits of adaptive selling behavior include design and delivery of specially adapted products/services and specially adapted sales pitches intended to meet customers' specific needs. According to the norm of reciprocity which exists within the social exchange theory framework, when salespeople provide their customers with such concrete benefits (i.e. value) it follows suit that customers will perceive

a higher level of value in their business relationship. Therefore, it is hypothesized that adaptive selling behavior will generate concrete benefits to the customer-salesperson exchange relationship, primarily in terms of value co-creation. This leads to the first hypothesis:

H1a: Adaptive selling behavior will have a positive effect on value co-creation.

The second hypothesis relates to the sales strategy of customer oriented-selling. Social exchange theory provides us with insight into why differences in a salesperson's customer orientation lead to heterogeneous relationship outcomes between customers (Anderson & Japp 2005). Because customer orientation reflects a salesperson's unique personality and inherent traits of customer intuition, it is believed to greatly influence those relationship dimensions most tied to a salesperson's good-naturedness and ability to fulfill obligations of the business exchange. It is therefore hypothesized that the effects of this strategy will be most impactful on the relational mediating variables of customer-perceived salesperson empathy and customer-perceived salesperson reliability.

According to social exchange theory, governance norms exist within social exchanges and relationships to establish an appropriate set of responses to *perceived* relationship benefits which are received by customers (Homans 1974). For example, if a salesperson engages in high levels of customer orientation in their dealings with a buyer, the norm of governance dictates that the appropriate response will be customer perceptions of strong benefits to the relationship. These relationship benefits include customer-perceived salesperson empathy and customer-perceived salesperson reliability.

Empathy has been shown to heavily (and positively) influence interpersonal relationships in the work of personality psychologists (Rychlak 1973). When a relationship experiences high

levels of empathy and understanding, both parties in the relationship stand to experience perceived benefits. Similarly, reliability is an important construct for business relationships which often require efficiency, ability to deliver on promises, and trust that the business partner will fulfill obligations. For example, in the work of Parasuraman et al. (1985); (1991), reliability was shown to positively influence customer-employee interactions. It is believed that customer-perceived salesperson empathy and customer-perceived salesperson reliability will be strongly affected by customer-oriented selling, which is a strategy characterized by the salesperson's personality and intuition as it manifests in the customer relationship.

H1b: Customer-oriented selling will have a positive effect on customer-perceived salesperson empathy.

H1c: Customer-oriented selling will have a positive effect on customer-perceived salesperson reliability.

According to social exchange theory, quid pro quo responses driven by the reciprocity norm shape customer responses to specific salesperson behaviors (Wetzel et al. 2014). Unlike adaptive selling which is enacted through training, and customer-oriented selling which is characterized as an aspect of the salesperson's personality, customer extra role behavior is volitional and dependent upon specific actions. Social exchange theory maintains that customers will rely on specific informational cues to determine the response or set of responses which is likely to maximize their own utility in a series of repeated exchanges (i.e. a relationship) (Rapp et al. 2013; Lawler & Thye 1999). The activation of the reciprocity norm leads to the belief that when salespeople engage in customer extra role behavior, it will be perceived by customers as a valued benefit to the relationship which can be captured by such tangible actions as communications. Because customer extra role behavior is volitional and dependent upon specific

salesperson actions, communications is hypothesized to be most strongly impacted by this selling behavior.

H1d: Customer extra role behavior will have a positive effect on customer-perceived communications.

It is important to note that this study can also assess the relative impacts of each selling strategy against one another to understand the relative effects of each on overall salesperson performance. This is a key factor which differentiates this research from prior literature—never before have all three selling strategies been tested within the same model. Additional analysis may therefore lead to a test of each individual selling strategy as it impacts overall salesperson performance.

3.3. Hypotheses Development for Customer Relationship Dimensions

Because the customer relationship dimensions are so indicative of the overall success of the buyer-seller interaction, it is hypothesized that a positive relationship between each relational factor and the perceived quality of interactions will emerge. Social exchange theory provides the theoretical underpinning for these hypotheses because it suggests that the behavioral response to the norm activations of governance and reciprocity will lead to greater perceived benefits in the customer-salesperson relationship (Wetzel et al. 2014). These perceived benefits felt by customers are hypothesized to lead to higher perceived quality of the overall relationship interaction. This leads to the following formal hypotheses:

H2a: Customer-perceived value co-creation will have a mediating effect on perceived quality of interactions.

H2b: Customer-perceived salesperson empathy will have a mediating effect on perceived quality of interactions.

H2c: Customer-perceived salesperson reliability will have a mediating effect on perceived quality of interactions.

H2d: Customer-perceived communications will have a mediating effect on perceived quality of interactions.

Social exchange theory provides an additional link between relationship quality and objective sales outcomes as the theoretical framework relies upon the idea of the norm reciprocity. The perceived benefits of a quality and productive relationship are hypothesized to lead to reciprocation in the explicit form of increased sales.

H3: Perceived quality of interactions will have a positive influence on salesperson net revenue.

3.4. Hypotheses Development for Moderation

Moderating effects are proposed regarding both customer demandingness and level of conflict. It is hypothesized that highly demanding customers will be less willing to perceive the benefits of salesperson selling strategies and will be less likely to place high value on buyer-seller relationship characteristics because of this effect. Social exchange theory holds that if the benefits of salesperson strategies are less salient, these customers will be less likely to reciprocate positively and may be less likely to perceive positive relationship characteristics. Highly demanding customers—those with high expectations and a general difficulty to please—are believed to negatively impact the link between selling strategies and customer relationship dimensions.

A similar phenomenon holds true for those customers who perceive a high level of conflict within the relationship with their seller. Social exchange theory contends that relationship partners who perceive a high level of conflict are less likely to activate relationship norms. The benefits of positive relationship factors may be less salient for them and hinder their perceptions of overall quality of the interaction. This leads to the following hypotheses:

H4a: Customer demandingness will weaken the positive relationship between adaptive selling behavior and value co-creation.

H4b: Customer demandingness will weaken the positive relationship between customer-oriented selling behavior and customer-perceived salesperson empathy.

H4c: Customer demandingness will weaken the positive relationship between customer-oriented selling behavior and customer-perceived salesperson reliability.

H4d: Customer demandingness will weaken the positive relationship between customer extra role behavior and customer-perceived salesperson communications.

H5a: Level of conflict will weaken the positive relationship between customer-perceived value co-creation and perceived quality of interactions.

H5b: Level of conflict will weaken the positive relationship between customer-perceived salesperson empathy and perceived quality of interactions.

H5c: Level of conflict will weaken the positive relationship between customer-perceived salesperson reliability and perceived quality of interactions.

H5d: Level of conflict will weaken the positive relationship between customer-perceived salesperson communications and perceived quality of interactions.

CHAPTER 4. METHOD

4.1. Sample and Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected from the customers of a U.S.-based logistics and distribution company in the business-to-business domain. The company provides freight and forwarding distribution services to customers in both the commercial and industrial markets and has offices throughout the United States and Mexico. The sales force structure at the firm is typical of many sales organizations wherein salespeople are encouraged to develop relationships with customers and practice behaviors that can increase customer satisfaction and retention. Customer relationships with salespeople at the firm typically proceed for extended periods of time as freight and forwarding services are sold in long-term packages and necessitate active engagement between the salesperson and the customer. Additionally, salespeople at the organization are given an expense account and instructed by managers to develop strong relational bonds with their customers. The relational orientation of the focal firm and the strong corporate culture towards maintaining close buyer-seller relationships makes this organization an appropriate context for the present research study.

Preliminary qualitative interviews were conducted with 21 different people at various levels within the organization. Regional salespeople, sales managers, and vice presidents of both supply chain and sales were all included in the interview schedule. The company CEO and founder were also interviewed to assess the degree of customer relationship emphasis placed on salespeople at the firm. Engaging in this series of in-depth qualitative interviews allowed for a better understanding of the organizational climate and structure as well as key insights into the

company's industry. Findings of the qualitative interviews determined that the firm, like many sales organizations, was dedicated to fostering strong ties with its customer base.

After the initial qualitative interviews, surveys were dispersed first throughout the sales force and then throughout the entire customer base. The surveying of salespeople's customers at the freight and forwarding organization was ideal for this study as much sales research is limited by the sole use of a salesperson perspective. The dispersion of the survey to the entirety of the customer base was important to avoid any issues of selection bias (Wasserman and Faust 1994). Selection bias may have led to responses only from those customers whom the salespeople favored strongly, which could have potentially detracted from the veracity of the results.

In order to incentivize customers to complete the survey, each customer had the opportunity to enter a drawing to win either a Visa gift card or a donation in their name to a charity of their choice. A compelling incentive structure such as this one was ideal to generate a favorable response rate. Favorable response rates are essential to provide an accurate depiction of the customer perspective of the focal firm's salespeople (Wasserman and Faust 1994). Bolander et al. (2015) offer credence for limiting the survey to a single firm's customer base as it allows for the control of many external factors like differences in corporate culture, industry biases, variants in company size, and so forth.

The final sample was 206 customers out a total possible customer base of 354 customers for a response rate of 58%. This is a highly favorable response rate which reflects the managerial support of this research effort and the attractive incentive structure. This final sample therefore encompasses a robust view of the firm's customer base.

4.2. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling

The first stage of model testing includes factor analysis as well as validity and reliability testing. This encompasses preliminary analyses such as Cronbach's alpha testing for scale reliability, validity testing to explore discriminant and convergent validity, and confirmatory factor analysis. These initial tests are to ensure that adequate reliability and validity parameters are met for each construct before proceeding with testing the final model. The final model was tested using a structural equation modeling method.

Structural equation modeling is sometimes referred to as path analysis and is used to both specify and analyze the interdependencies among observed and latent variables that underlie theoretical constructs (Hwang et al. 2010). Structural equation modeling has a long history in the marketing discipline with its inception being traced back to Bagozzi (1980). One common approach to structural equation modeling is the proposed partial least squares structural equation modeling method (Anderson and Gerbing 1988; Lohmoller 1989).

Partial least squares-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) is a component-based approach to structural equation modeling meaning that the latent variables in the analysis are fixed (Hwang et al. 2010). Bolander et al. (2015) state that the primary objective of PLS-SEM is to maximize the variance of endogenous variables within the model which are explained by exogenous variables (Hair et al. 2014). PLS-SEM yields both measurement and structural models and analyzes the two sub-models independently using a fixed-point algorithm (Hwang et al. 2010; Wold 1965). PLS-SEM does not necessitate the assumption of normality to complete parameter estimation (Hwang et al. 2010). PLS-SEM functions by conducting multiple regression equations and inputting their solutions. PLS-SEM also does not allow for an overall

measure of model fit, instead utilizing various local fit measures to evaluate the fit of a model (Hwang et al. 2010).

The partial least squares structural equation modeling method is appropriate for the testing of this particular model due to a variety of reasons. First, the objective of PLS-SEM is to maximize the variance of the endogenous variables explained by the exogenous variables (Hair et al. 2014; Bolander et al. 2015). This predictive analysis is appropriate for the objectives of this study. Bolander et al. (2015) also cite that network data distributions tend to be skewed and/or leptokurtic. It is for this reason that PLS-SEM was selected because results of such analysis will not be negatively impacted by the nonnormality in the data. Bolander et al. (2015) further note that PLS-SEM is ideal for estimation of complex models and this method is preferred for testing interactions because it does not over-inflate measurement errors (Chin, Marcolin, and Newsted 2003).

An additional reason that PLS-SEM is an appropriate method for analysis of this dataset is due to the fact that the sample size ($n=206$) errs on the smaller side. Other structural equation modeling techniques are more sensitive to sample size and require larger samples to run effectively (Wong 2010; Wong 2013). Because tests of moderation are proposed, a split sample procedure will be employed. This indicates that the full customer sample of $n = 206$ will be split in half to two smaller samples around $n = 103$. PLS-SEM will accommodate for these smaller samples and still provide an accurate test of the relationships within the model.

Furthermore, PLS-SEM makes no assumptions about the distribution of the variables, PLS-SEM is insensitive to non-normality, heteroscedasticity, and autocorrelation of the error terms, there are limited identification problems in PLS-SEM, and the method is suitable for research when improper or non-convergent results may be likely (Wong 2010; Wong 2013).

Because of the predictive nature of the conceptual model and the myriad reasons stated above, PLS-SEM was determined to be an appropriate method for analysis of the dataset. Additionally, PLS-SEM is an appropriate methodological approach for analyzing complex models such as the focal model of this dissertation (Bolander et al. 2010; Lohmoller 1989). Model complexity is often cited as an acceptable justification for using PLS-SEM in many highly regarded marketing journals (Bolander et al. 2010; Ernst et al. 2010; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2009).

Furthermore, the results of partial least squares structural equation modeling oftentimes do not differ significantly from the results of model testing using similar approaches (Bolander et al. 2010; Hwang et al. 2010). Hwang et al. (2010) conducted a simulation study which appeared in the *Journal of Marketing Research* that evaluated the PLS-SEM method against two similar approaches. In their study, Hwang et al. (2010) found that model specification was the only meaningful condition wherein the PLS-SEM method differed significantly from the other two methods in terms of parameter recovery. This was particularly problematic when the model exhibited issues of cross-loadings. With this caveat in mind, the constructs within the model will be thoroughly tested for cross-loadings before proceeding to analysis using PLS-SEM.

4.3. Measures and Operationalization

Measures were selected based on established scales with acceptable psychometric properties and empirical evidence of scale efficacy. All scales were measured on a five-point Likert scale and were shown to have adequate reliability and validity.

4.3.1. Adaptive Selling Behavior. To assess customers' perceptions of their salesperson's ability to engage in effective adaptive selling behavior, the adaptive selling scale developed by Chen and Jaramillo (2014) and Robinson et al. (2002) was utilized. In order to

accommodate for the customer perspective, scale items were reworded to reflect the buyer's point of view (i.e. "I design my sales presentation to respond to my customers' specific needs" was changed to "My salesperson designed his/her sales presentation to respond to my specific needs").

As stated previously, the prevalence of salesperson and sales manager studies in this research area is high, so it follows suit that many established scales in the sales domain are also oriented toward salesperson respondents. Because this study focused on the customer's perspective, several scale items were appropriately adapted to fit the context of the study. Restating scale items on the basis of the original scales to fit the respondents of a study is acceptable practice and has been done in recent empirical literature (Chen and Jaramillo 2014). The final adaptive selling behavior scale used three items which were tested for acceptable psychometric properties and parameters. A sample item was: "My salesperson effectively modified his/her sales presentation to my needs".

4.3.2. Customer-Oriented Selling Behavior. Customer-oriented selling behavior was measured using an established scale from Martin and Bush (2006). The final scale was comprised of four items which had acceptable psychometric properties and parameters. The scale was adapted to reflect the customer context of the study following the procedures outlined by Chen and Jaramillo (2014). The scale measured the customers' perception of their salesperson's ability to infer their customers' beliefs, desires, and intentions (Chakrabarty 2014). A sample item was: "My salesperson tries to find out what services would be most helpful to me as a customer".

4.3.3. Customer-Directed Extra Role Behavior. Customer-directed extra role behavior was measured using an established scale from Netemeyer et al. (2005). The final scale was made up of four items which had acceptable psychometric properties and parameters. The scale was adapted to reflect the customer context of the study (Chen and Jaramillo 2014). A sample item was: “My salesperson goes above and beyond the ‘call of duty’ when serving me”.

4.3.4. Customer-Perceived Value Co-Creation. Customer-perceived value co-creation was measured using adapted scales from Narver and Slater (1990), Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), Ettlie and Reza (1992), and Walter et al. (2001). The final scale utilized six items which were tested for adequate psychometric properties and parameters. The scale was adapted for the customer context of the study (Chen and Jaramillo 2014). A sample item was: “I engage in joint problem solving and decision making with my [firm name] salesperson”.

4.3.5. Customer-Perceived Salesperson Empathy. Customer-perceived salesperson empathy was measured using an established scale from Stock and Hoyer (2005). This scale was comprised of three items each which were tested for acceptable psychometric properties and parameters.

The customer-perceived salesperson empathy scale implies that there is an intellectual aspect of empathy which comprise a salesperson’s ability to understand their customers’ thoughts and feelings (Goldstein and Michaels 1985) as well as an emotional aspect of empathy which encompasses an emotional reaction to the customer (Goldstein and Michaels 1985). The scale was similarly adapted to reflect the customer context of the study following the procedures outlined by Chen and Jaramillo (2014). A sample item of the customer-perceived salesperson empathy scale was: “My salesperson has the highest level of empathy with respect to my needs”.

4.3.6. Customer-Perceived Salesperson Reliability. Customer-perceived salesperson reliability was measured using an established scale from Stock and Hoyer (2005). This scale was comprised of three items each which were tested for acceptable psychometric properties and parameters. The customer-perceived salesperson reliability scale captures the salesperson's ability to meet deadlines, achieve customer goals, and consistently perform customer-oriented behaviors (Stock and Hoyer 2005). The scale is derived from empirical work in relationship marketing literature as well as service quality literature (Friend et al. 2017; Amyx 2009) and was adapted for the customer-oriented context of the study (Chen and Jaramillo 2014). A sample item was: "My salesperson is a very reliable person".

4.3.7. Customer-Perceived Communications. Customer-perceived communications was measured using an established scale from Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Piercy (2007). The final scale utilized three items which were measured for adequate psychometric properties and parameters. The scale was adapted for the customer context of the study (Chen and Jaramillo 2014). A sample item was: "I get together with my salesperson periodically to plan responses to changes taking place in our business environment".

4.3.8. Perceived Quality of Interactions. Perceived quality of interactions was measured using an established scale from Moorman et al. (1992). The final scale utilized in the study was comprised of five items which were tested for adequate psychometric properties and parameters. The scale was adapted for the customer context of the study (Chen and Jaramillo 2014). A sample item was: "Disagreements between my salesperson and I tend to be handled productively".

4.3.9. Customer Demandingness. Customer demandingness was measured using an established scale from Ahearne et al. (2007). The final scale was comprised of four items which

were tested for adequate psychometric properties. A sample item was: “I require a perfect fit between my needs and [the firm’s] product/service offerings”.

4.3.10. Level of Conflict. Level of conflict was measured using an established scale from Jap and Ganesan (2000). The final scale was comprised of four items which were tested for adequate psychometric properties. A sample item was: “The relationship between my salesperson and I can best be described as tense”.

4.4. Factor Analysis

Factor analysis was conducted to determine the underlying factor structure for the data collected. Factor analysis was conducted on all scale items to assess convergent and discriminant validity of the proposed constructs in the model and to determine if there were any instances of concern in terms of cross-loadings. In order to conduct a factor analysis, the common factor method was first utilized for an exploratory factor analysis using SPSS software, followed by an assessment of the outer loadings of the model using SmartPLS software.

4.4.1. Exploratory Factor Analysis. The first stage of factor analysis was conducted using SPSS software. Factor analysis is conducted to identify interrelatedness between construct items which become factors (Tinsley and Tinsley 1987). The common factor method with maximum likelihood estimation was employed, which is appropriate for use with latent constructs. Eight factors were specified in the SPSS software prior to running the factor analysis in order to recover the hypothesized factor structure. The factor structure used an oblique rotation technique (direct oblimin with Kaiser normalization). The oblique (non-orthogonal) rotation technique allows for correlations between factors, which make the results of the factor analysis more reliable and easier to interpret (Bandalos and Boehm-Kaufman 2009).

To understand the factor structure and results of the factor analysis, assessment of the pattern matrix output is necessary. The pattern matrix shows the result of factor analysis after omitting small factor loadings (those below .4) and reordering the loadings for each item based on size. Please note that the item names are defined in Appendix B. The pattern matrix is seen in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1. Pattern Matrix

	Factor							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
AS_1		-.996						
AS_2		-.977						
AS_3		-.459						
CustO_3								-.739
CustO_4								-.715
CustO_2								-.518
CustO_1								-.489
Extra_2				.928				
Extra_1				.833				
Extra_3				.712				
Extra_4				.648				
CCV_2							.675	
CCV_5							.649	
CCV_1							.599	
CCV_4							.575	
CCV_6							.567	
CCV_3			.484					
Emp_2						-.852		
Emp_3						-.599		
Emp_1						-.588		
Reli_2					-.701			
Reli_3					-.638			
Reli_1					-.567			
Comms_1			.851					
Comms_2			.648					
Comms_3			.634					
PercQ_5	.747							
PercQ_4	.728							
PercQ_3	.569							
PercQ_1	.416							
PercQ_2								

The pattern matrix presented in Table 4.1 displays some problematic items which do not load highly on their focal constructs. PercQ_2 does not load highly on any construct while PercQ_1 and PercQ_3 have relatively low loadings on their focal construct (.569 and .416, respectively). AS_3 has a low loading on its focal construct, while CCV_3 loads with the communications construct.

It should be noted that some of the items display negative values in the pattern matrix, a phenomenon called factor score indetermination (DiStefano et al. 2009). For these values, it is necessary to take the absolute value to determine the factor score (DiStefano et al. 2009). While there were some problematic items identified, the pattern matrix shows an overall satisfactory factor structure with a majority of items loading correctly with their respective constructs. In order to meet the traditional norms of construct loadings, the problematic items PercQ_1, PercQ_2, PercQ_3, AS_3, and CCV_3 may be trimmed before final model estimation commences.

4.4.2. PLS Outer Loadings for Factor Analysis. The next stage of factor analysis was conducted in PLS using outer loadings. Outer loadings in PLS-SEM are estimated through the single regressions of each indicator variable on its corresponding construct (Hair et al. 2014). These outer loadings essentially represent correlations between constructs and reveal whether there are substantial issues of cross-loading between constructs. Because the common factor analysis using maximum likelihood estimation revealed that there are problematic items within certain constructs, the outer loadings should indicate how strong the correlations amongst these problematic items are. After assessing the outer loadings using PLS software, more information about which items should be trimmed can be gleaned which will result in an overall more favorable factor structure.

It should be noted that outer loadings are the appropriate values for examination rather than outer weights, which are calculated by a partial multiple regression equation where a latent construct is the dependent variable and its indicator variables are the independent variables (Hair et al. 2014). The Hair et al. (2014) text notes that outer weights should only be interpreted for formative measurement models. Because the model under study is a reflective model, the outer loadings are the values of concern to our analysis. The outer loadings for each constructs' items must exceed an acceptable threshold range of .708 as outlined in Hair et al. (2014). The outer loadings for the model are depicted in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2. Outer Loadings

	Adaptive Selling	Orientation	Extra Role Behavior	Value Co-Creation	Empathy	Reliability	Communications	Perceived Quality
AS_1	0.94							
AS_2	0.948							
AS_3	0.852							
CustO_1		0.888						
CustO_2		0.863						
CustO_3		0.918						
CustO_4		0.907						
Extra_1			0.912					
Extra_2			0.921					
Extra_3			0.903					
Extra_4			0.885					
CCV_1				0.615				
CCV_2				0.827				
CCV_3				0.77				
CCV_4				0.748				
CCV_5				0.862				
CCV_6				0.842				
Emp_1					0.925			
Emp_2					0.921			
Emp_3					0.921			
Reli_1						0.94		
Reli_2						0.949		
Reli_3						0.942		
Comms_1							0.939	
Comms_2							0.946	
Comms_3							0.941	
PercQ_1								0.698
PercQ_2								0.831
PercQ_3								0.912
PercQ_4								0.894
PercQ_5								0.908

Analysis of the outer loadings of the model indicate that just two of the thirty-two items' outer loadings were below this acceptable threshold of .708—Customer-Perceived Value Co-Creation item 1 (.615) and Perceived Quality of Interaction item 1 (.698). These items are bolded and shaded in Table 4.1 above for clarity of view. This means that all other items achieved adequate loadings on their respective constructs using the PLS outer loadings.

4.4.3. Factor Analysis Conclusion. Although the two problematic items were below the generally accepted threshold of .708, they were not below 0.4 which is the value considered immediate grounds for removal (Hair et al. 2014). The procedure outlined in Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2011) indicates that these two items should be removed from the model only if their deletion leads to an increase in the composite reliability and average variance extracted above the acceptable ranges. Therefore, before determining if any items should be deleted, more assessments of validity and reliability are necessary. The factor analysis proceeds with all items included. The next step is an assessment of convergent validity.

4.5. Convergent Validity

In order to determine if convergent validity has been established in the model, the indicators (items) of a construct are assessed in terms of their degree of “convergence” by analyzing if a high proportion of variance is shared. To determine if the model has convergent validity, both the outer loadings of indicators as well as the average variance extracted (AVE) are measured. High outer loadings ($>.708$) on a construct indicate that the associated indicators hold much in common with one another (Hair et al. 2014) and are therefore appropriate measures of the construct. This is also sometimes referred to as indicator reliability (Hair et al. 2014). The threshold value of .708 is determined by the square of a standardized indicator's outer loading or communality (Hair et al. 2014).

4.5.1. PLS Outer Loadings. The outer loadings of the items for each construct demonstrate that convergent validity has been established at the item level, excluding Customer-Perceived Value Co-Creation item 1 (.615) and Perceived Quality of Interaction item 1 (.698). In order to determine if these items along with the items which emerged in common factor analysis (Value Co-Creation item 3, Perceived Quality of Interaction item 2, Perceived Quality of Interaction item 3, and Adaptive Selling item 3) should be deleted, it is necessary to first assess reliability measures such as Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE). These measures for each construct are displayed in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3. Reliability Measures and AVE

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Adaptive Selling	.901	.938	.836
Customer Orientation	.916	.941	.800
Extra Role Behavior	.927	.948	.820
Value Co-Creation	.871	.903	.611
Empathy	.912	.945	.850
Reliability	.938	.961	.890
Communications	.937	.960	.888
Perceived Quality	.904	.929	.726

4.5.2. Internal Consistency Reliability. As pictured above, the Cronbach's alpha provides an estimate of scale reliability based on intercorrelations between the observed indicators. Cronbach's alpha is highly sensitive to the number of items in a scale and is generally regarded as a conservative measure of internal consistency reliability (Hair et al. 2014).

Cronbach's alpha values larger than 0.7 indicate a reliable scale for social science research (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994).

Another measure of internal consistency reliability is composite reliability. This measure differs from Cronbach's alpha in that it considers the differentials between outer loadings of indicators (Hair et al. 2014). As such, the composite reliability is calculated using a slightly different formula than that which is used to calculate Cronbach's alpha. Composite reliability scores are interpreted in much the same way as Cronbach's alpha scores (i.e. values > 0.7 are deemed acceptable). After assessing both the Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability scores for the model, it can be determined that internal consistency reliability is achieved throughout each construct at the item level.

4.5.3. Average Variance Extracted. To continue the exploration of convergent validity and to determine if item deletions are necessary for Customer-Perceived Value Co-Creation item 1 and Perceived Quality of Interaction item 1, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values must be examined. While Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability are common measures to establish convergent validity at the item level, AVE is a common measure to establish convergent validity at the construct level (Hair et al. 2014). The AVE criterion is the mean value of the squared loadings of the indicators associated with the construct (sum of squared loadings divided by the number of indicators) (Hair et al. 2014). AVE is also widely regarded as a measure of the communality of a construct. AVE values of 0.5 or higher indicate that the construct generally explains more than half of the variance of its indicators (Hair et al. 2014). As seen in Table 4.3 above, all constructs in the model have AVE values exceeding the 0.5 threshold. As such, convergent validity can be established at the construct level.

4.5.4. Convergent Validity Conclusion. Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and acceptable AVE values were established in the model without removal of the two indicators which had low (<0.7) outer loadings: Customer-Perceived Value Co-Creation item 1 (.615) and Perceived Quality of Interaction item 1 (.698). Because items should only be deleted from scales when an improvement over the acceptable threshold value for these tests is established (Hair et al. 2014), analysis of the model proceeds with these items remaining in the model.

4.6. Discriminant Validity

According to Hair et al. (2014), discriminant validity represents the degree to which a construct is truly distinct from other constructs within the model from an empirical standpoint. Establishing discriminant validity is important because it is illustrative of the unique ability of each construct to capture phenomena not represented by other constructs in the model. To determine if discriminant validity has been achieved, cross-loadings, the Fornell-Larcker criterion of discriminant validity, and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio must be examined.

4.6.1. Cross Loadings. To establish discriminant validity using cross loadings, an indicator's outer loading on its associated construct must be greater than all of its loadings on other constructs. High loadings for an indicator on a construct other than its associated construct may reveal that discriminant validity has not been established. To make this determination, the outer loadings of all items within the model will be examined for issues of cross loading. The cross loadings for the model are displayed in Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4. Cross Loadings

	Adaptive Selling	Orientation	Extra Role Behavior	Value Co-Creation	Empathy	Reliability	Communications	Perceived Quality
AS_1	.94	.498	.511	.567	.537	.415	.605	.564
AS_2	.948	.535	.542	.601	.567	.479	.65	.609
AS_3	.852	.571	.571	.586	.566	.527	.61	.61
CustO_1	.542	.888	.652	.596	.706	.654	.506	.713
CustO_2	.488	.863	.539	.562	.672	.598	.505	.64
CustO_3	.54	.918	.597	.64	.67	.742	.611	.708
CustO_4	.523	.907	.584	.619	.684	.73	.627	.724
Extra_1	.55	.639	.912	.589	.627	.624	.56	.645
Extra_2	.534	.638	.921	.53	.608	.61	.488	.633
Extra_3	.527	.558	.903	.531	.592	.553	.489	.606
Extra_4	.537	.561	.885	.527	.595	.565	.442	.596
CCV_1	.387	.361	.344	.615	.33	.297	.279	.391
CCV_2	.494	.51	.469	.827	.451	.458	.51	.517
CCV_3	.536	.58	.449	.77	.531	.611	.777	.682
CCV_4	.443	.478	.399	.748	.425	.463	.446	.458
CCV_5	.562	.61	.581	.862	.489	.608	.598	.64
CCV_6	.547	.582	.544	.842	.466	.594	.638	.608
Emp_1	.607	.747	.608	.581	.925	.66	.591	.709
Emp_2	.478	.67	.608	.475	.921	.607	.448	.614
Emp_3	.594	.69	.637	.546	.921	.599	.558	.69
Reli_1	.509	.732	.633	.629	.646	.94	.594	.694
Reli_2	.483	.704	.616	.627	.646	.949	.557	.632
Reli_3	.477	.724	.592	.622	.62	.942	.501	.671
Comms_1	.566	.521	.469	.641	.499	.504	.939	.611
Comms_2	.669	.662	.541	.689	.559	.614	.946	.692
Comms_3	.68	.59	.54	.692	.576	.526	.941	.698
PercQ_1	.434	.475	.419	.438	.419	.35	.432	.698
PercQ_2	.561	.642	.572	.639	.585	.557	.644	.831
PercQ_3	.625	.757	.628	.662	.749	.661	.68	.912
PercQ_4	.57	.686	.622	.646	.653	.672	.623	.894
PercQ_5	.565	.718	.648	.641	.65	.703	.613	.908

Pictured in Table 4.4 above are the cross loadings for the model. All values higher than .8 are shaded which allows clarity of view of the highest loadings throughout the chart. To establish discriminant validity using cross loadings, an indicator's outer loading on its associated construct should be greater than its loading on all other constructs within the model. Discriminant validity in terms of measures of cross loading can be established for all constructs in the model except for customer-perceived value co-creation.

With customer-perceived value co-creation, there is one issue of cross loading (highlighted). This item also came forward in the common factor analysis using maximum

likelihood estimation as problematic. The loading for item 3 (CCV_3) also loads highly on the construct communications. The outer loading value of the item CCV_3 is .77 on its respective construct and .777 on the construct communications. In order to establish discriminant validity for customer-perceived value co-creation at the construct level, item 3 (CCV_3) should be removed. Because removal of indicators is a delicate practice which should only be executed with care, other measures such as AVE and reliability should again be assessed to ensure that convergent validity and reliability are not sacrificed due to the removal of the item. Table 4.5 below illustrates the outer loadings for the model after CCV_3 was removed.

Table 4.5. Outer Loadings Without CCV_3

	Adaptive Selling	Orientation	Extra Role Behavior	Value Co-Creation	Empathy	Reliability	Communications	Perceived Quality
AS_1	0.94							
AS_2	0.948							
AS_3	0.852							
CustO_1		0.888						
CustO_2		0.863						
CustO_3		0.918						
CustO_4		0.907						
Extra_1			0.912					
Extra_2			0.921					
Extra_3			0.903					
Extra_4			0.885					
CCV_1				0.662				
CCV_2				0.827				
CCV_4				0.748				
CCV_5				0.862				
CCV_6				0.842				
Emp_1					0.925			
Emp_2					0.921			
Emp_3					0.921			
Reli_1						0.94		
Reli_2						0.949		
Reli_3						0.942		
Comms_1							0.939	
Comms_2							0.946	
Comms_3							0.941	
PercQ_1								0.698
PercQ_2								0.831
PercQ_3								0.912
PercQ_4								0.894
PercQ_5								0.908

Table 4.4 above demonstrates that none of the outer loadings were affected negatively by the removal of the item CCV_3. In fact, the first item in the customer-perceived value co-creation construct (CCV_1) improved from 0.615 to 0.662, indicating that the construct is operating more reliably after the removal of the third item CCV_3. While CCV_1 and PercQ_1 are still below the acceptable threshold of .708, these items still remain in the model because their deletion would not lead to an increase in composite reliability or AVE above the suggested threshold value (Hair et al. 2014).

Furthermore, the Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and AVE values for the construct customer-perceived value co-creation remain within the acceptable ranges after removal of CCV_3. The Cronbach's alpha value after removal of the third item CCV_3 is .857, the composite reliability is .897, and the AVE is .639. All of these values fall well within the acceptable ranges. This indicates that the removal of CCV_3 was not of detriment to convergent validity or reliability.

The next step is to once again assess the cross loadings in the model to determine if discriminant validity can be established after removal of CCV_3. Table 4.6 below shows these cross loadings with the removal of CCV_3.

Table 4.6. Cross Loadings Without CCV_3

	Adaptive Selling	Orientation	Extra Role Behavior	Value Co-Creation	Empathy	Reliability	Communications	Perceived Quality
AS_1	.94	.498	.511	.545	.537	.415	.605	.564
AS_2	.947	.535	.542	.571	.567	.479	.65	.609
AS_3	.854	.571	.571	.57	.566	.527	.61	.61
CustO_1	.543	.888	.652	.589	.706	.654	.506	.713
CustO_2	.488	.863	.539	.548	.672	.598	.505	.64
CustO_3	.541	.918	.597	.601	.67	.742	.611	.707
CustO_4	.523	.907	.584	.572	.684	.73	.627	.724
Extra_1	.55	.639	.912	.572	.627	.624	.56	.645
Extra_2	.535	.638	.921	.518	.608	.61	.488	.633
Extra_3	.527	.558	.903	.524	.592	.553	.489	.606
Extra_4	.538	.561	.885	.542	.595	.565	.442	.596
CCV_1	.388	.361	.344	.662	.33	.297	.279	.391
CCV_2	.494	.51	.469	.836	.451	.458	.51	.517
CCV_4	.443	.478	.399	.757	.425	.463	.446	.458
CCV_5	.562	.61	.581	.877	.489	.608	.598	.641
CCV_6	.548	.582	.544	.845	.466	.594	.638	.608
Emp_1	.607	.747	.608	.545	.925	.66	.591	.709
Emp_2	.478	.67	.608	.45	.921	.607	.448	.614
Emp_3	.595	.69	.637	.508	.921	.599	.558	.69
Reli_1	.509	.732	.633	.583	.646	.94	.594	.694
Reli_2	.484	.704	.616	.591	.646	.949	.557	.632
Reli_3	.478	.724	.592	.583	.62	.942	.501	.671
Comms_1	.566	.521	.469	.563	.499	.504	.939	.611
Comms_2	.669	.662	.541	.612	.559	.614	.946	.692
Comms_3	.68	.59	.54	.618	.576	.526	.941	.698
PercQ_1	.434	.475	.419	.427	.419	.35	.432	.698
PercQ_2	.561	.642	.572	.601	.585	.557	.644	.832
PercQ_3	.626	.757	.628	.609	.749	.661	.68	.912
PercQ_4	.57	.686	.622	.589	.653	.672	.623	.893
PercQ_5	.565	.718	.648	.588	.65	.703	.613	.907

Table 4.6 above displays a new table of cross loadings for the model with CCV_3 removed. The highest values (those above 0.8) are again shaded for clarity of view. All items now load cleanly on their associated constructs with no cross-loading problems. This indicates that this test of discriminant validity has been passed. While the items CCV_1 and CCV_4 still show outer loadings lower than 0.8 (.662 and .757, respectively), these values are still higher than the items' loadings on all other constructs. A similar case can be seen with PercQ_1 (.698). While this value is below 0.8, it is still higher than the item's loadings on all other constructs. This means discriminant validity has been established with regard to cross loadings.

4.6.2. Fornell-Larcker Criterion. While assessing cross loadings is an important barometer of discriminant validity, this criterion is widely regarded as rather liberal (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt 2011). A more conservative approach to further establish discriminant validity between the constructs in the model is the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Hair et al. 2014). The Fornell-Larcker criterion for assessing discriminant validity is appropriate for the model because all of the constructs are reflective (Hair et al. 2014).

The Fornell-Larcker criterion compares the square root of the AVE values with the latent variable correlations (Hair et al. 2014). To establish discriminant validity, the AVE should exceed the squared correlation with all other constructs. The reasoning behind this criterion holds that a construct should share more variance with its associated items than it shares with any other construct (Hair et al. 2014). The Fornell-Larcker criterion results are seen in Table 4.7 below.

Table 4.7. Fornell-Larcker Criterion Results

	Adaptive Selling	Orientation	Extra Role Behavior	Value Co-Creation	Empathy	Reliability	Communications	Perceived Quality
Adaptive Selling	0.914							
Customer Orientation	0.586	0.894						
Extra Role Behavior	0.594	0.056	0.905					
Value Co-Creation	0.616	0.646	0.596	0.799				
Empathy	0.61	0.763	0.67	0.546	0.922			
Reliability	0.52	0.764	0.651	0.621	0.675	0.944		
Communications	0.681	0.63	0.55	0.636	0.58	0.584	0.942	
Perceived Quality	0.652	0.779	0.686	0.666	0.73	0.706	0.71	0.852

In Table 4.7 above, the square root of each construct's AVE is on the diagonal (the shaded and bolded values). The AVE values were calculated by squaring each outer loading,

obtaining the sum of these squared outer loadings, and then calculating the average value. From the table above, it is clear that the square root of each construct's AVE is larger than its correlation with all other constructs, indicating that discriminant validity was achieved. The results of factor analysis were therefore successful; convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability were established within the model.

4.6.3. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio. A third and final test of discriminant validity testing is the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). The HTMT ratio provides insight into how different or discriminant constructs within a model are from one another. A successful HTMT test proves that constructs within a model are truly distinct and represent separate phenomena (Hair et al. 2014). The HTMT is calculated via ratios of the absolute value of correlations between indicators (Henseler et al. 2015). Values below 1 in the HTMT ratio test are ideal—the lower the value, the more discriminant the constructs are from one another. The HTMT results can be found in Table 4.8 below.

Table 4.8. HTMT Ratio Results

	Adaptive Selling	Customer Orientation	Extra Role Behavior	Value Co-Creation	Empathy	Reliability	Communications	Perceived Quality
Adaptive Selling								
Customer Orientation	.644							
Extra Role Behavior	.649	.717						
Value Co-Creation	.695	.719	.657					
Empathy	.669	.834	.727	.611				
Reliability	.564	.821	.696	.677	.729			
Communications	.737	.675	.584	.690	.620	.620		
Perceived Quality	.718	.847	.741	.741	.789	.751	.762	

Table 4.8 above demonstrates that all values in the HTMT ratio are well below 1, providing another indication that discriminant validity has been established within the model.

4.6.4. Factor Analysis, Validity, and Reliability Conclusions. In summary, results of the factor analysis and various tests of reliability and validity were largely successful, indicating that discriminant model testing can proceed. In the common factor analysis, several items came up as potentially problematic: AS_3, PercQ_1, and PercQ_3 had low loadings on their focal constructs, PercQ_2 did not load highly on any construct, and CCV_3 had issues of cross-loading with the communications construct. As such, it was important not to delete these items at this early stage because trimming of constructs is a practice which should only be undertaken when absolutely necessary. The model testing continued to see if these items may potentially be causing additional issues within the model.

The next stage of testing examined the outer loadings to further ascertain if there were substantial issues amongst constructs and/or items. When assessing the outer loadings, PercQ_1 and CCV_1 came forward as potentially problematic, although their values were quite near the acceptable threshold of .7. These items remained in the model as they were not below .4, which is the value considered immediate grounds for removal (Hair et al. 2014).

The next stage of assessment involved examining issues of convergent validity and reliability. All reliability measures (Cronbach's alpha and internal consistency reliability) passed without issue. Average variance extracted (AVE) was examined to determine if convergent validity had been established at the construct level. All AVE values were above .5, indicating that convergent validity had indeed been established.

The next step in assessing the model was to examine various tests of discriminant validity. It was during the examination of cross-loadings that again the item CCV_3 came up as

problematic. CCV_3 was first revealed in the preliminary factor analysis stage as potentially problematic because it loaded with the communications construct rather than its own focal construct. When assessing discriminant validity with regard to cross-loadings, CCV_3 again came forward as problematic in terms of its high loading on the communications construct. Because this item came forward as a potential problem in factor analysis, and further because discriminant validity could not be established with this item, the item was removed from the model before estimation. After removal of CCV_3, discriminant validity was established in terms of cross-loadings, the Fornell-Larcker criterion, and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT).

CCV_3 was the only item which was removed from the model because it was the only item which proved to negatively affect tests of reliability, convergent validity, or discriminant validity. Hair et al. (2014) notes that item removal should only be conducted if absolutely necessary (i.e. in the case that certain tests of reliability/validity fail) because latent constructs are best measured when all of their items are present. By removing many items from a scale, the content validity of the latent construct may be comprised. Therefore, it is necessary to remain prudent when trimming constructs and enacting item deletions.

4.7. Testing the Conceptual Model.

Overall, the results of partial least squares model testing indicate that the proposed conceptual model's hypotheses were largely supported. A detailed overview of the base model's results, accompanying hypotheses support, moderation testing results, and other relevant information are all provided in the sections below.

4.7.1. Model Estimation. Table 4.9 lists the results of the initial model testing which was conducted using a bootstrapping technique to determine significance. More specific results of the data analysis are discussed thereafter.

Table 4.9. Results of Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Support	Path Coefficients & P-Values
H1a: Adaptive Selling Behavior → Value Co-Creation	Supported	0.616 (p = 0.000)
H1b: Customer-Oriented Selling → Salesperson Empathy	Supported	0.763 (p = 0.000)
H1c: Customer-Oriented Selling → Salesperson Reliability	Supported	0.764 (p = 0.000)
H1d: Customer Extra Role Behavior → Communications	Supported	0.550 (p = 0.000)
H2a: Value Co-Creation → Perceived Quality of Interactions	Supported	0.175 (p = 0.004)
H2b: Salesperson Empathy → Perceived Quality of Interactions	Supported	0.326 (p = 0.001)
H2c: Salesperson Reliability → Perceived Quality of Interactions	Supported	0.210 (p = 0.019)
H2c: Communications → Perceived Quality of Interactions	Supported	0.287 (p = 0.000)
H3: Perceived Quality of Interactions → Net Revenue	Supported	0.086 (p = 0.039)

In terms of salesperson strategies and behaviors and their impacts on customer-perceived relationship dimensions, all the hypotheses were supported. Adaptive selling behavior was found to have a significant impact on co-creation of value in support of H1a ($\beta = 0.616$, $p = 0.000$). Customer-oriented selling behavior was found to have a significant impact on both customer-perceived salesperson empathy (H1b) and customer-perceived salesperson reliability (H1c) ($\beta = 0.763$, $p = 0.000$; $\beta = 0.764$, $p = 0.000$). Customer extra role behavior was also found to have a significant impact on customer-perceived salesperson communications in support of H1d ($\beta = 0.550$, $p = 0.000$).

Additionally, in terms of customer-perceived relationship dimensions and their impacts on the perceived quality of interactions, all hypotheses were again supported. Customer-perceived value co-creation had a significant impact on perceived quality of interactions in support of H2a ($\beta = 0.175$, $p = 0.004$). Customer-perceived salesperson empathy was found to have a significant impact on perceived quality of interactions in support of H2b ($\beta = 0.326$, $p = 0.001$). H2c was also supported as customer-perceived salesperson reliability had a significant impact on perceived quality of interactions ($\beta = 0.210$, $p = 0.019$). Further, customer-perceived salesperson communications had a significant impact on perceived quality of interactions in support of H2d ($\beta = 0.287$, $p = 0.000$).

Similarly, perceived quality of interactions had a significant, positive influence on net revenue, lending support for H3 ($\beta = 0.086$, $p = 0.039$). This means all hypotheses from H1 through H3 were supported in the model.

Figure 4.1 below provides a graphical depiction of hypotheses support with the significant paths and hypotheses bolded for clarity.

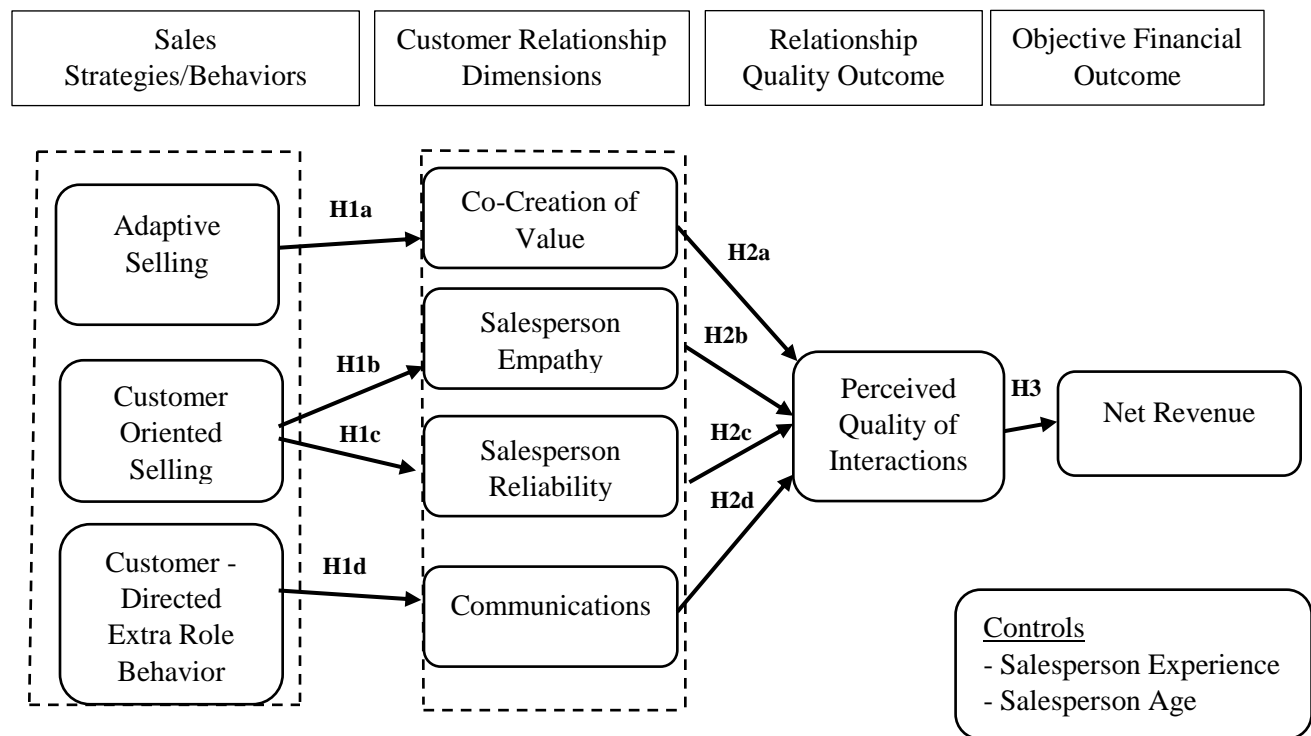


Figure 4.1. Conceptual Model Hypotheses Support

4.7.2. Total Effects. Total effects in the model were estimated by testing the three antecedent variables (selling strategies and behaviors) for their relationships with the final outcome variable net revenue. This model was estimated in order to uncover the relative influence of each individual selling strategy on the overall outcome variable net revenue and perhaps to ascertain which selling strategy was most impactful within the model. The estimated model and results are displayed in Figure 4.2 below. The path coefficient is listed on the arrow with the p-value in parentheses.

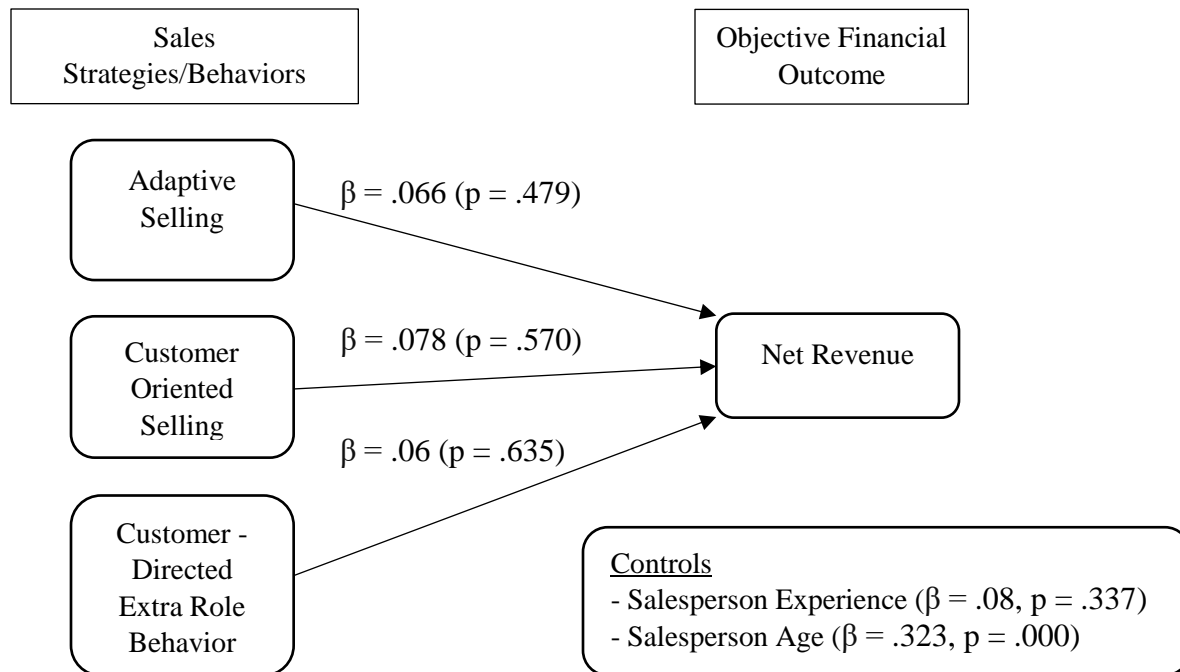


Figure 4.2. Total Effects

As can be seen in Figure 4.2 above, none of the antecedent variables had a significant effect on the overall objective financial outcome variable net revenue. One of the control variables, salesperson age, had a significant effect on the outcome variable net revenue achieved ($\beta = .323$ $p = .000$). The non-significance of the antecedent variables provides some evidence to support the notion that the full hypothesized model captured all possible effects, including mediating effects. The non-significance of the three antecedent selling strategies in the total direct effects model may therefore indicate that the mediating mechanism is essential to explain the relationships between the selling strategies and the objective salesperson performance measure net revenue. The non-significance of this total effects model lends some support to the notion that there are no substantial unmediated effects of the three exogenous antecedent variables in the original model. In order to confirm that the model has captured all possible mediating effects, another model will be tested which also includes direct effects of the three

exogenous selling strategies to the perceived quality of interactions outcome variable as well as the net revenue achieved outcome variable.

4.7.3. Direct Effects.

Direct effects in the model were calculated by estimating the full model including all exogenous antecedent variables, the mediating relationship dimension variables, the perceived quality of interactions variable, and the net revenue achieved outcome variable. Control variables also remained in the model during direct effects testing. The primary paths of concern are the direct effects. The direct effects are illustrated by the path arrows that appear from the exogenous variables to the outcome variables perceived quality of interactions and net revenue in Figure 4.3 below. While the other hypothesized paths still remained in the tested direct effects model, they are not drawn in Figure 4.3 for clarity of view and because the primary focus of this test is to assess direct effects.

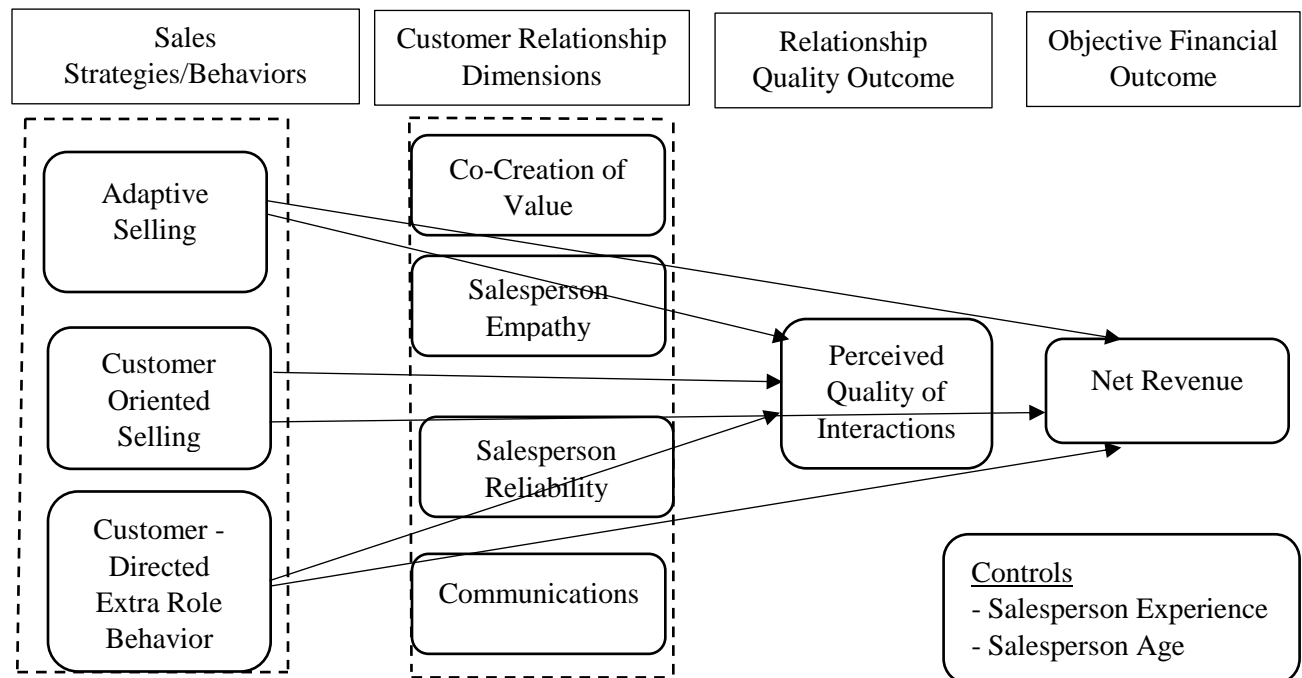


Figure 4.3 Direct Effects

Above are the direct effects paths illustrated from the exogenous selling strategy variables to the outcome variables perceived quality of interactions and net revenue achieved. The other hypothesized paths still remained in the model during estimation but were not drawn in Figure 4.3 for ease of view. The direct effects results are available in Table 4.10 below.

Table 4.10. Direct Effects

Direct Effect	Path Coefficient	P-Value	Direct Effect Established
Adaptive Selling Behavior → Perceived Quality of Interactions	.059	.361	No
Customer-Oriented Selling → Perceived Quality of Interactions	.272	.001	Yes
Customer Extra Role Behavior → Perceived Quality of Interactions	.123	.073	No
Adaptive Selling Behavior → Net Revenue	.027	.677	No
Customer-Oriented Selling → Net Revenue	-.195	.064	No
Customer Extra Role Behavior → Net Revenue	.068	.318	No

As seen in Table 4.10 above, the only direct effect which was significant was that from customer-oriented selling → perceived quality of interactions. This indicates that the other two antecedent selling strategy variables (adaptive selling behavior and customer extra role behavior) were fully mediated by the relationship variables in the model. The only significant unmediated direct effect occurred with the customer-oriented selling variable's relationship to perceived quality of interactions. This indicates that the mediating mechanism within the model did not fully explain the influence of customer-oriented selling on perceived quality of interactions. However, the mediating mechanism of relationship dimensions in the model did fully explain the

influence of both adaptive selling behavior and customer extra role behavior on both perceived quality of interactions and net revenue achieved. It should also be noted that none of the antecedent selling strategies had a significant direct effect on the final objective financial outcome variable, which indicates that there were no unmediated effects in terms of this final net revenue outcome.

4.7.4. Moderation. Regarding moderation, two different variables were tested: customer demandingness and level of conflict. To test H4a-H4d and H5a-H5d and assess if customer demandingness or level of conflict had a significant impact on the relationships between salesperson strategies/behaviors and customer relationship dimensions and customer relationship dimensions and perceived quality of interactions, several different strategies were employed to assess significance. First, interaction terms were built into the model to assess significance using the product indicator approach. For the product indicator approach, all possible pair combinations of the indicators of the latent predictor and latent moderator variable are utilized. These products terms serve as indicators of the interaction terms in the structural model.

The product indicator approach was utilized rather than the two-stage approach (which uses the latent variable scores of the latent predictor and the latent moderator variables stemming from the main effects model) because the product indicator approach is a more conservative estimation of moderating effects with more degrees of freedom (Hair et al. 2014). The product indicator approach also assesses error better than the two-stage approach. In both approaches the product term generated is standardized and an automating weighting mode was employed.

A bootstrapping procedure with 5000 subsamples was used to assess significance of the eight moderating interaction terms being tested. The results are available in Table 4.11 below.

Table 4.11. Interaction Terms Moderation Testing Results

Hypotheses	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	P-Value	Support
H4a: Adaptive Selling Behavior → Value Co-Creation	-.044	.056	.377	Not Supported
H4b: Customer-Oriented Selling → Salesperson Empathy	-.019	.05	.707	Not Supported
H4c: Customer-Oriented Selling → Salesperson Reliability	.061	.082	.398	Not Supported
H4d: Customer Extra Role Behavior → Communications	.012	.065	.782	Not Supported
H5a: Value Co-Creation → Perceived Quality of Interactions	.101	.102	.1	Not Supported
H5b: Salesperson Empathy → Perceived Quality of Interactions	-.071	.109	.427	Not Supported
H5c: Salesperson Reliability → Perceived Quality of Interactions	0	.079	.831	Not Supported
H5d: Communications → Perceived Quality of Interactions	.003	.097	.913	Not Supported

The moderation testing results for customer demandingness and level of conflict provided no support for hypotheses H4a-H4d or hypotheses H5a-H5d. The results of all interaction tests were unsuccessful as none of the proposed moderating effects were significant. To further assess if moderation may be present, multi-group moderation analysis will be implemented.

The first step of multi-group moderation analysis in PLS is to assess the bias-corrected confidence intervals. The dataset was separated using a median-split procedure to designate high and low groups for both customer demandingness and level of conflict. The confidence intervals provide lower and upper limit values within which a true population parameter will fall with

some specific probability (e.g. 95%) (Hair et al. 2014). Each group's results on a path coefficient are deemed to be significantly different if the displayed bias-corrected confidence intervals do not overlap with one another (Hair et al. 2014). The results for the customer demandingness moderating variable are seen in Table 4.12 below.

Table 4.12. Multi-Group Testing of Moderation by Customer Demandingness

Hypotheses	Sample Mean	Bias	2.50%	97.50%	Overlap
H4a: Adaptive Selling Behavior → Value Co-Creation	High Group: .575 Low Group: .694	High Group: .012 Low Group: .007	High Group: .404 Low Group: .535	High Group: .671 Low Group: .777	Not supported
H4b: Customer-Oriented Selling → Salesperson Empathy	High Group: .627 Low Group: .834	High Group: .015 Low Group: -.001	High Group: .465 Low Group: .738	High Group: .716 Low Group: .901	Supported
H4c: Customer-Oriented Selling → Salesperson Reliability	High Group: .695 Low Group: .784	High Group: .004 Low Group: .001	High Group: .478 Low Group: .6	High Group: .81 Low Group: .88	Not supported
H4d: Customer Extra Role Behavior → Communications	High Group: .481 Low Group: .602	High Group: .007 Low Group: .008	High Group: .245 Low Group: .401	High Group: .656 Low Group: .727	Not supported

As seen in Table 4.12 above, the bias-corrected confidence intervals of the high group overlap with the bias-corrected confidence intervals of the low group for each parameter except H4b: Customer-Oriented Selling → Salesperson Empathy. According to both Hair et al. (2011) and Hair et al. (2014), this indicates potential significance for only H4b. For this parameter, the high group had bias-corrected confidence intervals (Lower = .465; Upper = .716) which did not overlap with the bias-corrected confidence intervals seen in the low group (Lower = .738; Upper

= .901). This indicates the two groups (high demandingness customers and low demandingness customers) are not significantly different from each other for all other parameters.

Before moving to further PLS Multi-Group Analysis testing, it is necessary to assess the bias-corrected confidence intervals for the level of conflict moderating variable. The results are seen in Table 4.13 below.

Table 4.13. Multi-Group Testing of Moderation by Level of Conflict

Hypotheses	Sample Mean	Bias	2.50%	97.50%	Overlap
H5a: Value Co-Creation → Perceived Quality of Interactions	High Group: .205 Low Group: .313	High Group: .039 Low Group: .001	High Group: -.148 Low Group: .147	High Group: .36 Low Group: .485	Yes
H5b: Salesperson Empathy → Perceived Quality of Interactions	High Group: .357 Low Group: .242	High Group: -.053 Low Group: .001	High Group: .082 Low Group: .091	High Group: .642 Low Group: .417	Yes
H5c: Salesperson Reliability → Perceived Quality of Interactions	High Group: .167 Low Group: .194	High Group: .014 Low Group: .008	High Group: -.191 Low Group: .03	High Group: .482 Low Group: .321	Yes
H5d: Communications → Perceived Quality of Interactions	High Group: .272 Low Group: .24	High Group: .006 Low Group: -.006	High Group: .004 Low Group: .103	High Group: .531 Low Group: .395	Yes

As seen in Table 4.13 above, the bias-corrected confidence intervals of the high level of conflict group overlap with the bias-corrected confidence intervals of the low level of conflict group for each parameter. Because the bias-corrected confidence intervals overlap for the high

and low level of conflict groups on every parameter, there is no support for any of the hypotheses H5a-H5d.

The final step for moderation testing is to move to PLS Multi-Group Analysis to assess the moderating significance of customer demandingness for the Customer-Oriented Selling → Salesperson Empathy path. This is the only path of concern as it was the only parameter with bias-corrected confidence intervals that did not overlap.

The high and low customer demandingness groups were utilized in this analysis and group selection was completed in the PLS software. Specifically, there is need to assess the bootstrapping results (5000 subsamples) with parallel processing, no sign changes, and a two-tailed test type at the .05 significance level. The PLS Multi-Group Analysis test results are listed in Table 4.14 below.

Table 4.14. PLS Multi-Group Analysis Results for Moderation by Customer Demandingness

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	P-Value High Group vs. Low Group	Support
H4b: Customer-Oriented Selling → Salesperson Empathy	.027	.650	Not Supported

As seen in Table 4.14 above, the customer-oriented selling → salesperson empathy path does not display a p-value below .05 or above .95, indicating that there is no significant difference between high and low customer demandingness groups (Hair et al. 2011). Similarly, both the parametric test and the Welch-Satterthwait test do not yield significant p-values (.788 and .758, respectively) for the path of customer-oriented selling → salesperson empathy. This

indicates that there are not group differences strong enough for customer demandingness to result in a significant p-value. There is therefore no support for H4b.

Results of moderation testing for both customer demandingness and level of conflict variable were unsuccessful across all of the methods employed. Insights of these analyses demonstrate that the previously held assumptions that relationships characterized by high levels of conflict or high customer demandingness would tend to see diminishing effects of selling strategies and relationship dimensions were false. There was no support either for moderation with regard to interaction terms or multi-group moderation analysis. Implications of these findings are further discussed in the conclusion.

4.7.5. Results Overview. In summary, the base model which was hypothesized was largely successful as all hypotheses from H1-H3 were supported by the model estimation results. All antecedent selling strategies had significant influence on the relationship dimensions within the mediating mechanism. Furthermore, the relationship dimensions all significantly influenced customers' perceptions of interaction quality with their salespeople. Finally, this perceived quality of relational interactions significantly influenced overall objective salesperson performance in the manner of net revenue achieved. These significant results indicate that the hypothesized model was by and large successful.

Furthermore, after testing the total effects and direct effects of the model, there is strong evidence to suggest that the antecedent selling strategy variables are fully mediated or explained via the relationship mechanism in terms of their impact on the final outcome variable, net revenue achieved. The only unmediated effect present appeared in the direct effect of customer-oriented selling on perceived quality of interactions.

Unfortunately, neither moderating hypothesis H4 or H5 was supported, providing no evidence that customer demandingness or level of conflict were significant moderators of the model. The results of moderation testing indicate that neither the demandingness of the customer or the level of conflict perceived by the customer in their buyer-seller relationship enhanced or detracted from the proposed relationships in the model. This is a surprising finding which will be further explored in the final concluding chapter.

When reviewing all final results of model testing, it should also be noted that parameter estimates between .05 and .10 may in some instances be deemed as weakly supported. These weakly supported estimates may provide direction for further research studies where greater statistical power may be possible. The sample size of 206 may have proven too small to uncover additional significant relationships within the model. It is a worthy endeavor for future research to continue to explore these weakly supported parameter estimates with a larger sample or a revised model that may bear the statistical power necessary to uncover significance.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

This studied applied social exchange theory in the context of salesperson and customer relationships to uncover the underlying impacts of customer perceptions of salesperson strategies and behaviors and their ultimate impacts on relational factors and overall relationship quality. The success of the model is demonstrated by the many supported hypotheses which illustrate how important assessment of relational factors in salesperson/customer dyads truly is. This study provided insight into the effectiveness of particular salesperson strategies and behaviors and thus presents implications for training on these behaviors in sales organizations. One important contribution of this study is in its ability to test customers' viewpoints on their salespersons' behaviors and exhibition of relationship-fostering qualities. Overall, the study provides much credence to the necessity of quality buyer/seller relationships in the context of sales.

5.1. Theoretical and Conceptual Contributions

This was an empirical study based on the theoretical framework of social exchange theory that examined the system of effects of customer perceptions of salesperson strategies and behaviors on customer perceptions of relationship-based variables on the dependent variables of relationship quality and salesperson net revenue achieved. This study offered insights into the complex influence of salesperson-enacted strategies and behaviors on customer perceptions of the buyer-seller relationship's quality. From these results several different managerially-relevant insights emerge.

At the customer level of perception, all of the proposed selling strategies/behaviors had the anticipated positive effects on the hypothesized relationship dimensions. Adaptive selling positively correlated with customer-perceived value co-creation, customer-oriented selling

positively correlated with both customer-perceived salesperson reliability and customer-perceived salesperson empathy, and customer-directed extra role performance positively correlated with customer-perceived salesperson communications. Customers who perceived their salespeople as engaging more highly in these salesperson strategies and behaviors also perceived higher levels of the relationship-based variables. The relationship mechanism fully mediated the effects of the salesperson strategies/behaviors on perceived quality of interactions, providing insight into the process by which customers perceive quality in their buyer-seller relationships. Furthermore, perceived quality of interactions had a strong positive influence on salesperson net revenue achieved. This final effect demonstrates the overall impact of relational factors as they translate into financial performance. This lends further insight into the study of these selling strategies and their influences on the customer relationship.

In contrast to the aforementioned positive results, the results of moderation testing were unsuccessful with more demanding customers and less demanding customers showing no group differences or moderation interactions across the hypothesized relevant paths. Similarly, relationships characterized by high levels of conflict showed no differences between those relationships with low levels of conflict, garnering no support for the proposed hypotheses.

The findings regarding moderation offer no support to the idea that very demanding customers will perceive a salesperson's strategies as less impactful on specific relational factors. Similarly, no support was provided for the idea that those relationships characterized by high levels of conflict would see diminished effects of relationship dimension on perceived quality of interactions. These findings are non-intuitive and speak to the complexity and subtle nuance of buyer-seller relationships. Future research will seek to uncover true moderating variables which

have significant impacts on the proposed paths. It may be the case that different variables should be tested to determine what elements moderate the paths in this model.

5.2. Managerial Implications

Regarding training of salespeople, this study offers key implications for sales organizations and sales managers. From the organizational perspective, training salespeople to engage more highly in adaptive selling behavior by custom-tailoring sales presentations to each individual buyer has much empirical backing based upon this research study. Adaptive selling behavior was highly impactful within the tested model and showed strong positive results on both customer perceptions of relationship quality and value co-creation within the relationship. From a managerial perspective, selecting salespeople who show a higher prevalence toward adaptive selling behavior, customer-oriented selling behavior, and salespeople who engage more highly in customer-directed extra role behavior can lead to greater customer perceptions of the buyer-seller relationship quality.

This study provides insight into customer perceptions and illuminates how customers perceive certain strategies and behaviors enacted by their salespeople. Sales organizations can train salespeople to engage more highly in these behaviors to improve customer relationship quality and can also select salespeople who exhibit a propensity towards these selling strategies and behaviors. These findings indicate that customers truly do take into account the ways in which salespeople behave and strategize and those perceptions factor into the customers' perceptions of overall relationship quality. Salespeople who enjoy quality relationships with their customers tend to reap benefits in terms of net revenue achieved. Additionally, customers who perceive a high level of quality within their buyer-seller relationship may be more satisfied with

their interactions and may in the future be less likely to defect from the company—making this insight highly important for sales organizations.

5.3. Limitations

As with all research studies, certain limitations do impact the quality of the data and the subsequent insights derived from that data. This study was not without its limitations and it is important to note these in order for future research efforts to move forward in a meaningful manner.

First, all studies based solely on survey data suffer from an inability to infer causality (Maxham et al. 2008). The relationships proposed and tested were correlational, therefore inferring cause-effect is outside of the scope of this study. While the scales used to measure the constructs of import were empirically tested for adequate reliability and validity and intended to maintain the highest degree of robustness for the results, surveys are inherently limited to correlational results.

Second, while the data were collected from customers representing many different firms, there was only one focal sales organization. All of the customers were asked to think about their relationships with one single salesperson at the firm in question. This is a limitation of the study because a broader network of organizations may have provided a richer picture of different salespeople and organizational strategies. The focal sales firm was typical of many sales organizations in that it strongly encouraged fostering close customer relationships through “wine and dine” and other relationship-building methods. Not all sales organizations employ these tactics, so testing customer perceptions of salespeople from a variety of different organizations may have provided more generalizability of the results.

Third, there was only partial support found for the moderating effect of level of conflict. This dissertation can only speculate about the reasons why the level of conflict moderator only achieved partial support. It may be the case that customers who characterized their relationships with salespeople as highly conflicted actually responded better to empathy and communications, rather than worse as was hypothesized. It seems worthwhile to examine this variable more closely in future study.

5.4. Future Research Directions

The most prominent future direction for this research lies in identifying more factors which can potentially improve or diminish the salesperson/buyer relationship. Identifying potential moderators is important to strengthening the model and building a more complete picture of the buyer-seller relationship. While understanding the mechanisms that drive buyer-seller relationships and customers' perceptions of relationship quality is vastly important, determining the types of variables that can enhance or detract from those relationships is also paramount to the nature of this research.

Further, after finding that there is a distinct linkage between salesperson performance and customer-perceived relationship quality, it is clear that this is a future research direction deserving of study. The Schrock et al. (2016) meta-analysis of the *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management* maintained that relationship marketing strategies within the context of sales is a sadly under-researched area and it is the intention of this researcher to fill that gap in the literature and provide more credence to the importance of understanding buyer-seller relationships as they influence objective salesperson outcomes. Continuing to identify and empirically test variables which may enhance or detract from the buyer/seller relationship is a

worthy future research direction. This is especially true now that the overall impact of relational dimensions on objective salesperson performance has been established.

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APPENDIX A. TABLE SUMMARIES

Table 2.1. Literature Review of Adaptive Selling

- Forty-five papers outlined.
- Two strictly conceptual papers which built the foundations of the construct.
- Three of the papers were scale development or analysis of existing scales used to measure adaptive selling.
- One of the papers was a qualitative study which examined managerial opinions of the newly emerging adaptive selling construct.
- Twenty-eighty of the papers showed strong positive results of adaptive selling on various measures of salesperson success.
- One of the papers showed negative results of adaptive selling behavior.
- Three of the papers showed mixed results of adaptive selling behavior.
- One of the papers showed results which were neither overtly positive, negative, or mixed—this paper simply elucidated gender differences between male and female salespeople’s enactment of adaptive selling behavior.

Table 2.2. Literature Review of Customer-Directed Extra Role Behavior

- Five papers outlined.
- Four of the papers showed positive results of customer-directed extra role behavior.
- The fifth paper outlined was an examination of prosocial employee behaviors and identified important antecedents of these behaviors.
- The papers outlined demonstrate that customer evaluations are contingent upon service employees such as salespeople with whom the customer interacts.

Table 2.3. Literature Review of Customer-Oriented Selling

- Twelve papers outlined.
- Nine of the papers outlined showed overall positive effects of customer orientation on job performance and other measures of sales success.
- Two of the papers outlined displayed a nonsignificant effect of customer orientation on performance.
- One of the papers showed customer orientation only increased self-rated salesperson performance.

Table 2.4. Literature Review of Salesperson Empathy

- Eleven papers outlined.
- Nine of the papers outlined showed significant positive effects of salesperson empathy on sales performance and various measures of customer satisfaction with a salesperson.
- Two of the papers showed mixed results including an inverted u-shaped effect of salesperson empathy as well as a single significant interaction term of salesperson empathy.

Table 2.5. Literature Review of Salesperson Reliability

- Five papers outlined.
- All five papers showed some degree of positive influence of reliability on customer outcomes such as trust as well as salesperson performance.
- One of the papers outlined utilized a confirmatory factor analysis to highlight salesperson reliability as an important dimension in the salesperson-buyer relationship.

Table 2.6. Literature Review of Value Co-Creation

- Three papers outlined.
- One of the papers outlined is a conceptual piece which built the foundations of the construct.
- One of the papers outlined is a qualitative piece which identified key characteristics of value co-creation.
- The third paper outlined found that customer relationships contribute to the value perceived by the supplier.

Table 2.7. Literature Review of Salesperson Communications

- Three papers outlined.
- All three papers found that communications had a positive effect on sales/business relationships.
- One of the papers found that communications had a positive impact on relationship investment.
- One of the papers examined communication quality and found positive effects on job satisfaction and organizational commitment.
- One of the papers found that improved communications led to more effective collaboration between organizational departments.

APPENDIX B. SUPPLEMENTAL DATA

Adaptive Selling - Cronbach's Alpha: .901

Chen and Jaramillo (2014), JPSSM

Item names: AS_1, AS_2, AS_3

1. My salesperson designed his/her sales presentation to respond to my specific needs.
2. My salesperson effectively modified his/her sales presentation to my needs.
3. My salesperson recognizes the strengths and weaknesses of his/her products or services.

Customer Oriented Selling - Cronbach's Alpha: .916

Martin and Bush (2006), JAMS

Item Names: CustO_1, CustO_2, CustO_3, CustO_4

1. My salesperson has my best interests in mind.
2. My salesperson achieves his/her goals by satisfying my needs.
3. My salesperson tries to find out what services would be most helpful to me as a customer.
4. My salesperson gives an accurate expectation of what products/services will do for me.

Customer-Directed Extra Role Behavior - Cronbach's Alpha: .927

Netemeyer, Maxham, and Pullig (2005), JM

Item Names: Extra_1, Extra_2, Extra_3, Extra_4

1. My salesperson goes above and beyond the "call of duty" when serving me.
2. My salesperson is willing to go out of the way to make me satisfied.
3. My salesperson voluntarily assists me even if it means going beyond job requirements.
4. My salesperson often helps me with problems beyond what is expected or required.

Customer-Perceived Value Co-Creation - Cronbach's Alpha: .871

Narver and Slater (1990), JM; Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), JIM; Ettlie and Reza (1992), AMJ; Walter et al. (2001), IMM

Item Names: CCV_1, CCV_2, CCV_3, CCV_4, CCV_5, CCV_6

At my organization...

1. We share responsibilities with [the firm] and its salespeople.
2. [The firm's] salespeople can contribute to the value that we provide them.
3. [The firm's] salespeople regularly visit with customers.
4. Business functions at [the firm] are integrated to better serve my needs.
5. I engage in joint problem solving and decision making with [the firm's] salespeople.
6. I am in constant dialog with my salesperson [at the firm].

Customer-Perceived Salesperson Empathy - Cronbach's Alpha: .912

Stock and Hoyer (2005), JAMS

Item Names: Emp_1, Emp_2, Emp_3

1. My salesperson has the highest level of empathy with respect to my needs.
2. My salesperson easily adapts to my perspective.
3. My salesperson is able to adapt my interaction to my needs in different situations.

Customer-Perceived Salesperson Reliability - Cronbach's Alpha: .938

Stock and Hoyer (2005), JAMS

Item Names: Reli_1, Reli_2, Reli_3

1. My salesperson is a very reliable person.
2. My salesperson typically makes sure that promised deadlines are met.
3. Customers can rely on [the firm's] salespeople.

Customer-Perceived Communications - Cronbach's Alpha: .937

Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Piercy (2007), JPSSM

Item Names: Comms_1, Comms_2, Comms_3

1. My salesperson meets with me at least once a quarter to discuss market trends and developments.
2. My salesperson spends time assessing my future needs.
3. I get together with my salesperson periodically to plan responses to changes taking place in our business environment.

Perceived Quality of Interactions - Cronbach's Alpha: .904

Morman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992), JMR

Item Names: PercQ_1, PercQ_2, PercQ_3, PercQ_4

1. Disagreements between my salesperson and me tend to be handled productively.
2. My meetings with my salesperson produce novel insights.
3. My salesperson displays a sound strategic understanding of my business in their interactions with me.
4. My salesperson is very team oriented in their interactions with me.
5. My interactions with [the firm's] salespeople are productive

Customer Demandingness - Cronbach's Alpha: .791

Ahearne, Jelinek, and Johns (2007), JAMS

Item Names: CusDem_1, CusDem_2, CusDem_3, CusDem_4

1. I am demanding in regard to product/service quality and reliability.
2. I have high expectations for service and support.
3. I require a perfect fit between my needs and [the firm's] product/service offerings.
4. I expect to receive the highest level of product quality and service quality.

Level of Conflict - Cronbach's Alpha: .802

Jap and Ganesan (2000), JMR. Adapted from Kumar, Stern, and Achrol (1992), JMR

Item Names: LevCon_1, LevCon_2, LevCon_3

1. The relationship between me and my salesperson can best be described as tense.
2. I have significant disagreements in my working relationships with [the firm's] salespeople.
3. I frequently clash with [the firm's] salespeople on issues relating to how we should conduct business.

APPENDIX C. IRB APPROVAL

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST



TO: Juliana White
Marketing

FROM: Dennis Landin
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: August 4, 2015

RE: IRB# E9433

TITLE: Sales Strategy Study

Institutional Review Board
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair
130 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8682
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irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb

New Protocol/Modification/Continuation: New Protocol

Review Date: 8/3/2015

Approved X Disapproved

Approval Date: 8/4/2015 Approval Expiration Date: 8/3/2018

Exemption Category/Paragraph: 2b

Signed Consent Waived?: Yes, if online or by phone. If interviews are in-person then signed consent is needed.

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable):

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable)

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman 

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –
Continuing approval is **CONDITIONAL** on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. **SPECIAL NOTE:** If emailing more than one recipient make sure to use bcc.

**All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at <http://www.lsu.edu/irb>*

VITA

The researcher and author of this dissertation, Juliana White, holds an M.S. degree in Marketing from the University of South Florida as well as a B.S. degree in Business Administration from Florida A&M University. She is currently a doctoral candidate at Louisiana State University and expects to defend her dissertation in the Summer of 2018. Juliana's industry experience includes ad hoc marketing strategy and consumer insight projects for a variety of organizations. She has worked on a corporate brand management project for the Tampa Bay Rays Major League Baseball Team, conducted qualitative interviews as a research assistant for the Mosaic Company, and worked on strategic development of a collegiate marketing and recruitment program for the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Juliana's research has been presented at the Global Sales Science Institute, the Academy of Marketing Science Annual Conference, the National Conference in Sales Management, the Society for Marketing Advances Annual Conference, and the Southeast Marketing Symposium. She was a fellow at the American Marketing Association Sheth Foundation Doctoral Consortium and the Academy of Marketing Science Doctoral Consortium. Her teaching experience includes courses in Marketing Research, Consumer Behavior and Analysis, and International Marketing. Juliana has also worked as a coach for Louisiana State University's Professional Sales Institute competition team.